

THE ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT IN IOWA,
1833-1860

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CHAPTER I

ANTISLAVERY IN IOWA: THE PROBLEM THROUGH OTHER EYES

If one predominant thread could be picked from the tangled skein of social and political preoccupations in the middle decades of 19th century America, that thread would probably be the slavery controversy. No State or territory, no citizen, no level of government could long escape involvement with the question. It served as a focus for most national issues. Americans inevitably examined such problems as internal improvements, foreign policy, and territorial organization in light of their effects on the various sections of the country; and at the root of the basic sectional dilemma was the economic, political and social reality of the slave system.

Men might attempt to escape entanglement in the whole issue, but lasting immunity was totally impossible. The question had an appalling habit of following in the train of any territorial immigration, and it proved itself a hardy traveller--dropping roots easily in virgin land. In few territories was this inevitable insistency of the slavery controversy so graphically exemplified as in the early history of Iowa. This State, like so many others, found itself pulled irresistably into the very vortex of the great contention, no matter how much its citizenry might wish to avoid it.

The land comprising Iowa, resting between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, was long the uncontested domain of various Indian tribes. It came into the territorial claims of the United States as part of the extensive Louisiana Purchase, and as such it immediately and unavoidably became involved in the slavery question.

The entire Louisiana Territory fell first under the jurisdiction of the governor of Indiana, and, as that area was part of the Old Northwest Territory and thus expressly forbidden to house slavery, the natural assumption was probably that the new land would likewise be free-soil.¹ Such an assumption was quickly proven untenable, however, since the institution already flourished in the French settled delta lands at the mouth of the Mississippi. In 1804 a commission of judges under Indiana's Governor William Henry Harrison met in St. Louis to divide the huge new acquisition into districts. This commission, viewing slavery's entrenchment as a fait accompli, ruled that the entire territory was open to the system.²

Thus, from its inception, Iowa found itself involved in the slavery question, and this long before any white man ever dreamed of

¹Edgar Rubey Harlan, A Narrative History of the People Of Iowa (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1931), I, 41.

²Ibid.

settling there. However, 1804 was not a year of agitation over the expansion of the South's "peculiar institution," and Americans gave little thought to the implications of the decision rendered by Harrison's commission. Not until 1820 and the passage of the Missouri Compromise would the question of slavery in the Louisiana Territory surface as a source of contention. It was that landmark decision which determined the nature of Iowa's early settlement. Missouri gained admission to the Union as a slave state and all the land north of 36° 30', an area which included Iowa, was declared free.¹ However, the solution provided by the Missouri Compromise was largely academic since Iowa still remained virgin territory.

Then, in September of 1832, Black Hawk, the charismatic rebel chieftain of the Sac and Fox Indians, suffered defeat at the hands of an American force under General Winfield Scott; and the victors pressured him into signing away a slice of his tribal lands along the west bank of the Mississippi River.² This fifty-mile-wide strip was opened to white settlement on June 1, 1833, and once the restless American immigration began, the Indians found themselves pushed inexorably back.³

For the first three years of Iowa's frontier history Michigan Territory exercised jurisdiction over her. Then, in 1836, this parent

¹Ibid., p. 54.

²Ibid., p. 68.

³Ibid.

territory achieved Statehood and the reins passed to Wisconsin. On July 4, 1838, Iowa gained territorial status in her own right, and Statehood followed on December 28, 1846.¹

During the entire period of settlement and evolving political autonomy there was, ostensibly at least, no question of Iowa's official attitude on slavery. By the terms of the Missouri Compromise Iowa was to be free-soil, and her settlement proceeded accordingly. Yet the involvement of the frontier settlers could not be so easily disposed of, Iowa received immigrants from all sections of the country, and these pioneers brought their home-grown attitudes with them regardless of any predetermined political arrangements. Furthermore, the whole concept of Negro bondage was far more complicated than a simple "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not possess slaves in this land."

The Missouri Compromise simply could not dictate men's attitudes, and attitudes are the agents which determine a people's response on any moral and social question. The key, then, to understanding the nature of Iowa's involvement with the slavery question lies in recognizing the dominant attitudes of the population at large throughout the State's entire antebellum history. This, of course, is a very delicate and challenging undertaking.

Previous students of this subject have settled rather unanimously on a single thesis, which Joel Sibley probably best expressed

¹Ibid., pp. 68-120.

in his article, "Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa, 1838-1861." Basically the position of Sibley and his colleagues was:

Iowa's antebellum history can be divided into three different eras. During the first period, lasting until about 1846, great support for slavery existed; in the second period, lasting until 1854, the state underwent a transition; in the final period Iowa took its place in the roster of antislavery states. This gradually changing opinion was due in the main to the make-up of the population.¹

In more or less detail this represents the body of historiography on the subject. The position taken was that Iowa moved from proslavery to antislavery sentiments between 1833 and 1861. This shift occurred because Southern immigrants initially influenced State attitudes, but they came gradually to be displaced by more abolitionist-oriented settlers.

The expression of this single dominant theme was all but universal: "It is clear that the people who first began to look with covetous eyes across the Mississippi to the attractive lands in Iowa in the main hailed from the South."²...."The pioneer state of Iowa drew heavily upon the South for its population, and its political and social ideas."³...."Prior to 1850 only one New Englander for every six Southerners settled in Iowa. In only a few towns....were the abolitionists

¹Joel H. Sibley, "Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa, 1833-1861." Iowa Journal of History and Politics, IV (October, 1957), 289.

²F. I. Herriott, "Whence Came the Pioneers of Iowa?" Annals of Iowa, VII (June, 1906), 456.

³Harlan, op. cit., p. 269.

in a clear majority."¹

All these variations on the theme of early Iowa being a haven for proslavery attitudes hinged on the contention that Southern-oriented settlers initially dominated the population. The only departure from this line of thinking came with the additional note by Sibley that the nascent proslavery outlook was also influenced by the economic reality that, until the coming of the railroads, Iowa's only reliable outlet for goods was south down the Mississippi.² But even in this minor addendum, Sibley stood alone.

Obviously, reputable historians would not endorse this theme of population shifts determining an attitude shift from proslavery to antislavery without offering proofs to support it; and they do, in fact, submit considerable evidence. Their initial task in proving a shift in attitudes demanded that they demonstrate that Iowa was early imbued with proslavery sentiment. This in turn required, to their way of thinking, that they indicate the domination of Southern-oriented elements in the State's opening wave of settlement.

However, before commencing the work of proving their thesis the established historians took the liberty of broadening the scope of the

¹Curt Harnack, "The Iowa Underground Railroad," The Iowan, IV (June-July, 1956), 21.

²Sibley, op. cit., p. 296.

term "Southerner." As one of the chief of their number, Edgar Harlan, put it:

Since the Civil War "the South" as a term marking a political subdivision has been applied most generally to the group of seceding states. An older and perhaps more accurate boundary between North and South was Mason and Dixon's line, between Pennsylvania and Maryland, and which, if extended Westward, would put Southern Ohio, Southern Indiana, Southern Illinois, and most of Missouri in the South. It was from "the South" as thus defined that the largest number of Iowa pioneers came.... The Federal Census of 1850 affords figures which substantiate this definition of the Southern origins of the Iowa population up to that time.¹

Be that as it may, 1850 is a rather late date to begin gathering census materials on Iowa's early immigration patterns. However, as F. I. Herriott, the historian who specialized in census enumerations, sadly noted, "the nativity of the pioneers of Iowa, those settling in the State prior to 1850, unfortunately cannot be determined precisely."² The reason for this is simply that prior to 1850 censuses did not concern themselves with the nativity of immigrants to America's newly-opened lands. As a result Herriott and his colleagues had to resort to more deductive proofs of the sectional backgrounds of the new Iowans.

Their first piece of evidence was the recorded nativity of the State's earliest territorial representatives. Back when Iowa District was a part of the Wisconsin Territory, that parent area allowed it eighteen delegates to the territorial assembly. In 1836 Iowa held its first election and chose those eighteen. Eight of the men selected

¹Harlan, op. cit., pp. 269-270.

²Herriott, "Whence the Pioneers?" op. cit., p. 447.

were from free-states, eight were former slave-state residents, and two were from Ireland.¹ More importantly, if Harlan's Mason-Dixon Line split is accepted, four of the eight free-staters came from the questionable border States.² The fact that Iowa's first electorate chose predominantly Southern-born delegates suggested, for Herriott and company, an estimable Southern population in the area.

In addition to the examination of the lineage of Iowa's first representatives, some historians chose to offer the nativity of its territorial governors as another deductive proof of their thesis. There were only three chief executives in Iowa during the territorial period, Robert Lucas (1838-1841), John Chambers (1841-1845), and James Clarke (1845-1846).³ Herriott, however, noted significantly that the first two, Lucas and Chambers, were Southerners--Virginia and Kentucky respectively.⁴

In further support of their thesis alleging Southern influence in early Iowa, established historiography offers the election of senators as a third deductive piece of evidence. The first two U. S. senators chosen by the State, Augustus Caesar Dodge and George Wallace Jones, exhibited a suspiciously pro-Southern bias in Congress. As

¹Harlan, op. cit., pp. 101-102.

²Ibid. The actual breakdown of the nativity of the "select eighteen" was: Pennsylvania 4, Ohio 1, Tennessee 3, Kentucky 3, New York 1, Virginia 1, Georgia 1, Illinois 1, New Hampshire 1, and Ireland 2.

³Herriott, "Whence the Pioneers?" op. cit., p. 458.

⁴Ibid., pp. 458-459.

Herriott pointed out, Dodge and Jones were the only "Northern" senators, save one from Pennsylvania, who could boast voting both against the Wilmot Proviso and for the Fugitive Slave Law in the Compromise of 1850.¹ Furthermore, Jones, born in Southern Indiana, was long a close personal friend of Jefferson Davis and exchanged a warm correspondence with him.²

Finally, of all the individual items of this deductive genre, the most convincing is an excerpt from an 1854 letter which newly-elected Iowa governor, James W. Grimes, wrote to Salmon P. Chase. As edited by Herriott, the Governor's letter declared that

The Southern half of our State is strongly pro-slavery, but I think we will be able to carry a majority with us for free principles.... The north third of our state will be to Iowa politically what the Western Reserve is to Ohio.³

Herriott found this excerpt terribly significant in supporting his thesis. He maintained that

The implications plainly are: first, people of Southern sympathies, if not Southern lineage numerically prevailed in Iowa up to 1856; second, the same was true of Southern Ohio; and third, the opponents of slavery, if they were to win....had to depend upon the division of the Southern residents of Iowa.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 465.

²George Wallace Jones Correspondence (State Historical Library, Des Moines), Vol. 5, No. 2, Feb. 9, 1837, and Vol. 7, No. 15, May 9, 1857.

³Herriott, "Whence the Pioneers?" op. cit., p. 462.

⁴Ibid.

In short, Herriott maintained that Grimes' letter neatly exemplified both the general thesis of early pro-Southern (hence pro-slavery) attitudes in Iowa and also the Harlan contention on the Mason-Dixon split.

However, this letter and the other foregoing proofs of the established thesis were used only because the census reports of those early years did not include information on the area of nativity of Iowa's citizenry. But from 1850 to 1860 such information was recorded and Herriott did extensive research to compile that data.¹ Since the decade 1850-1860 supposedly witnessed the transition from proslavery to antislavery attitudes; and since established historiography holds that shifting immigration patterns determined that transition; then the natural expectation is that the census materials for those years would indicate a steady decline in the percentage of Southern-born or Southern-oriented residents in Iowa, and, conversely, a steady rise in Eastern and Northeastern elements. This in fact, is exactly what Herriott found.

Between 1850 and 1856, the year of a State census, the percentage of Southern-born residents in Iowa dropped about 5%, and between 1856 and 1860 it lost another $3\frac{1}{2}\%$. In total the Southern drop went from 18.1% to 9.5%.² By the same token the percentage of New England and Middle State natives in the State rose, as expected, from 17.7% to

¹Ibid., p. 464. See below, pp. 138-139.

²Ibid.

24.4% between 1850 and 1856, then settled back slightly to 22.6% by 1860.¹

This then rested the case for the established historiography. It contended that since Southern-born natives would logically bring proslavery biases to Iowa when they came, then the State was initially proslavery since deductive evidence points to a Southern-oriented citizenry prior to 1850. Next it maintained that Iowa shifted gradually to an antislavery stance as new waves of immigrants from the East displaced the older Southern element, and Herriott's census compilations appear to back that contention. On the whole, therefore, the thesis seems cogent, logical and well documented.

Yet there exists a certain tenuousness to this whole body of thought. First, a cursory glance at antebellum Iowa history reveals events and situations which stand in glaring contradiction to the accepted work. Then too, the evidence offered by Herriott, Sibley and company is itself open to criticism.

First of all a closer look at the census information reveals certain figures which refuse to fit neatly into the pattern suggested by the accepted thesis. To begin with, New Englanders, the group logically expected to exercise the greatest antislavery influence in Iowa, were never a significant proportion of the population. In the

¹Ibid.

transition decade 1850-1860 their percentage rose only 1.1%, that is from 3.3% to 4.4%.¹ The next most strident group would probably hail from the Middle States, and that element increased its influence only about four percent--from 14.4% to 18.2%.² Lastly, the 8.6% drop in the Southern-born segment of Iowa's population was made up not only by a growing Eastern immigration, but by the rising proportion of native Iowans.³

This re-examination of Herriott's work does not, of course, negate his entire thesis; but it does suggest the need to avoid a blind acceptance of it, and it also indicates that the deductive evidence might stand closer inspection as well.

As to the States of nativity of Iowa's first delegates to the Wisconsin Assembly there is no question on the facts themselves. However, the unfortunate absence of all records concerning the selection of those men demands that some caution be exercised in drawing conclusions from that selection. While logic presupposes that a sectionally fragmented population, as Iowa doubtless had in 1836, would likely choose representatives who reflected its own background, such a presupposition has its weaknesses. For example, two of the eighteen assemblymen chosen were from Ireland, but it is a bit far-fetched to assume that Iowa was one-ninth Irish in 1836.

Then there is the matter of the three territorial governors.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Again the facts by themselves stand unimpeachable. Iowa Territory's first two chief executives, Robert Lucas and John Chambers, were indeed Southerners. But once more the implications drawn from this fact are open to criticism. These men were the political appointees of the Presidents under whom they served.¹ The established historiography submitted no evidence that any of the governors received his appointment because his President wanted to give Iowa a chief executive who reflected its population make-up.

On the question of the congressional records of Iowa's first senators, A. C. Dodge and George Jones, the accepted historians stand even more plainly exposed to rebuttal. If they sought to demonstrate proslavery attitudes in Iowa by submitting that Jones and Dodge harbored such sentiments they are guilty of ignoring conflicting evidence. It is quite true that the two senators voted for proposals generally favorable to the South, but they did so for reasons totally divorced from proslavery convictions on their part. In point of fact neither made any secret of his antislavery beliefs.

In the June 17 debate on the Compromise of 1850, Dodge spoke out in the Senate Chamber:

If destiny should chance, some years hence, to translate my slave-owning colleague⁷ and myself to the plains of Utah or New Mexico when the question comes up of their admission as States

¹Governor Lucas was chosen by Van Buren, Chambers by William Henry Harrison, and James Clark by Polk. Thus a New Yorker and an Indianan selected the two slave-staters.

into the Union, and should he be in favor of slavery, I shall be found fighting on the stump and in the press against slavery.¹

A few days later Jones reiterated almost verbatim the sentiments expressed by his fellow Iowan:

I am now, as I have ever been, opposed to [slavery]; by which I mean that in any State or Territory where that question is to be decided, were I to be a resident, no man would be more decided in his opposition to its establishment than I would be.²

Neither of these passages allows much chance of mistaking the speaker as a proslavery advocate. Using the votes of Dodge and Jones without reading these qualifying statements into the record indicts the researchers who do so of employing dubious historiographical methods.

However, criticizing the work of established historians is, by itself, an unsatisfactory pursuit. The criticism alone simply indicates flaws in the foregoing studies, and suggests the possible need of revisionism. The next step is the presentation of hard evidence which contradicts existing historiography; and such evidence does indeed exist. This documented material not only tends to refute the contention that Southerners dominated early Iowa settlement, but it also hits directly at the basic axiom underlying the entire traditional thesis, i.e. that Southern-oriented immigrants were by definition proslavery.

Research actually indicates that many immigrants coming out of

¹Appendix to the Congressional Globe For the First Session of the Thirty-First Congress (Washington: John C. Rives, 1850), Vol. XIX, Part 1, 910.

²Ibid., p. 1716.

slave-states saw Iowa as a haven from a system they despised. In short, they did not bring home-grown proslavery sentiments with them, but precisely the opposite convictions. Early pioneers like the Salem Quakers, David Rorer and James C. Jordan are but a few representatives of this Southern-born antislavery element who can be submitted in support of a revisionist effort.

The Quaker settlement of Salem sprang up in Southeastern Iowa in 1835. Founded by Virginia Friends who had come to the State expressly to escape contact with the institution of slavery, the little town early demonstrated its convictions by forcing a slave-owning brother to dispose of his human property.¹ Although the entire population of the little village was apparently imbued with anti-slavery attitudes, a segment of the citizenry opted for a greater militancy than their brethren by opening a depot on the famed Underground Railroad.²

Attorney David Rorer is another example of antislavery sentiment driving a Southern-born emigrant to Iowa's free-soil. Also born and raised in Virginia, Rorer practiced law in Arkansas and was an admitted slave-owner there.³ In the fall of 1835, however, he freed--

¹Louis Thomas Jones, The Quakers of Iowa (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1914), p. 187.

²Ibid., pp. 189-191.

³John Ely Briggs, "A Rare Man," The Palimpsest, XXVI (September, 1945), 260.

not sold--his slaves and set out for Iowa.¹ As an attorney in his new home Rorer eventually served as counsellor in two of the State's most famous fugitive slave cases.

Des Moines' future State Senator, James C. Jordan, gave probably the most militant expression to antislavery sentiment in the Southern-born segment of Iowa's population. Another Virginian, Jordan spent his early years as a professional slave-catcher, tracking down and returning fugitive Blacks.² These activities so disgusted him that once in Iowa he did a complete about-face and became chief conductor on the Polk County branch of the Underground Railroad.³

While the above Southerners were clearly antislavery in attitude, census reports would list them merely as slave-state immigrants. No chapter in those statistical volumes devoted itself to cataloguing a people's convictions. Yet if these men represented a substantial element of thought in Southern-influenced settlement, serious doubt clouds the contentions drawn by earlier historians from their deductive evidence and census tables.

In all fairness, however, a later work by Herriott did show an understanding of the possibility of antislavery sentiment in Iowa's

¹Ibid.

²Johnson Brigham, The History of Des Moines and Polk County (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1911), II, 1047.

³Ibid.

Southern population, but in doing so he also raised questions which he failed to answer.

The great majority of Southerners in Iowa left the South because of their dislike of slavery.... In one sense they were pronouncedly anti-slavery--that is they did not want the institution with them or near them. But per contra, they were most emphatically pro-slavery in the sense that they were violently opposed to abolitionism, which meant Negro equality, which they abominated.¹

Actually, this forthright statement would complicate the whole nature of previous historiography had it become an accepted tenet of Herriott's colleagues; but he alone offered the arresting departure from established opinion. So, beyond demonstrating its author's deeper understanding of the problem, the quote is meaningless in that it did not appreciably alter the general tenor of the basic thesis which Herriott had helped to initiate and propagate.

In addition to the question of antislavery sentiments in the Southern-born population, there is one other matter which challenges the foregoing studies of early Iowa attitudes. There existed a small corps of drumbeaters and propagandists whose work extolled the new Territory of Iowa and urged footloose Americans to migrate westward to the promising frontier area. In the course of their labors these men revealed a good deal about the pattern which the State's settlement might have taken.

¹F. I. Herriott, James W. Grimes Versus the Southrons (Des Moines: Historical Department of Iowa, 1926), p.9.

Foremost among the Territory's advancement was Albert M. Lea, surveyor, mapmaker, and doubtless the greatest expert on the lands of the Mississippi Valley during the early years of Iowa's development. In 1835 Lea wrote a small volume entitled Notes on the Wisconsin Territory. This tract recounted the nature of previous immigration and reviewed the virtues of Iowa for any who contemplated a move to new lands. He noted no particular Southern influx, but rather that the Old Northwest Territory was sending the bulk of new settlers.¹ On the question of slavery Lea maintained that Iowa was free from the system--and fortunately so:

This district, being north of the State of Missouri, is forever free from the institution of slavery, according to the compact made on the admission of that State into the Union. So far as the political wealth and strength of the country is concerned, this is a very great advantage; for the region is too far north for negroes [sic] to be profitable. Besides, all experience teaches us that....free states grow far more rapidly than slave states.²

Ten years later another chronicler came to hail Iowa's virtues in the same general terms. This was the flamboyant Henry Clay Dean whose varied career also included employment as a lawyer, a sometime Methodist preacher, and Chaplain of the U. S. Senate from 1855 to 1856. In a long article he wrote for the Pittsburg Christian Advocate

¹Albert M. Lea, Notes on the Wisconsin Territory, (Philadelphia: Henry S. Tanner, 1836), p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 15.

in 1846, Dean compared the rapid settlement of Iowa into neat New England-style farms to the slow development of older Missouri. The reason for this disparity was obviously slavery.¹ In further discussing the slavery problem he betrayed a rather unrealistic attitude, yet a significant one all the same:

Slavery cannot be abolished anywhere by itinerant abolition lecturers--they have no influence; nor by the interference of those where it does not exist--they have no power. Nor by slave stealing, and persuading slaves to leave their masters.... But I believe, in the Providence of God, they will eventually be free, and I sometimes hope will, like their emigrating masters....seek a new home, and eventually people with civilization their fatherland.²

Dean's Pollyanna wish that blacks return to their homeland takes on an arresting impact. Like Lea's tract it helps demonstrate that, at least in propagandists' views, the impulse of Iowa's settlement exhibited a free-soil tendency. But beyond that, Dean's attitude raises the possibility of a thus far unrecorded mood in early Iowa, a mood of blatant escapism. This possibility could be of crucial importance; for, if the State did not shift from proslavery to anti-slavery positions, what course did it take on the disruptive controversy and what were the dominant attitudes which determined that course? Obviously, only a general review of Iowa's entire antebellum response to slavery can answer that question properly.

¹The Henry Clay Dean Papers (Des Moines: State Historical Library), Vol. I, "Scrapbook."

²Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE ERA OF ESCAPISM: 1833-1854

The Senator from Louisiana lives near the mouth of the great river of the West, and I many miles above him, on the same river. It is due to candor that I should tell him I am against his black boys--that is, I want none of them, nor anything to do with them. But sir, just so far as they have entered into the Constitution of the United States, and so far as they enter into the question of State rights and sovereignty of the people, I am for them; I am for enacting just such laws as will hold the Senator and myself together as friends in all times to come.¹

With these words Iowa's Senator A. C. Dodge justified his impending affirmative vote on the various acts which would embody the Compromise of 1850. The statement is undoubtedly the clearest and most concise condensation of his State's governing attitude which could possibly be found in one place. It neatly summarized every facet of the corporate sentiments of pre-1854 Iowa. All the threads are there and can be precisely enumerated: the desire to escape from dealing with slavery and Blacks, a conscientious determination to abide by Constitutional dictates, and an almost obsessive desire to conciliate and soothe ruffled Southern sensibilities. It is perhaps symbolic that this revealing pronouncement should have been issued during the Compromise debates. At any rate a simple cataloguing of those pre-1854 episodes which touched upon slavery and the Negro illustrates fully how

¹Congressional Globe, op. cit., p. 910.

that triad of attitudes—escapism, Constitutionality and conciliation--motivated Iowa's response in each instance.

In the annals of "official Iowa" during its territorial period, three events occurred which give indications of the State's slavery sentiments. While two of these three support, in the main, the opinion that the new frontier district was basically antislavery, the third is fodder for established historiography. This latter example of supposedly proslavery thinking on the official level was the passage in the Territorial Assembly of Iowa's first and only Black Code.

Entitled "An Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes," the Code cleared the fledgling territorial legislature on January 21, 1839, a scant seven months after Iowa had become an independent political creature.¹ Section 1 provided that no Black or mulatto could reside in the territory without possessing a court certificate attesting to his freedom and posting a \$500 bond to assure that he would not become a criminal or a county charge. Section 2 declared that any Negro or mulatto who failed to post bond could be hired out by the county for six months, and the money derived then be applied to the bond. Section 3 was a more liberal article, providing a \$50 to \$100 fine for any sheriff who jailed a Black or mulatto without court sanction. Section

¹Statute Laws of the Territory of Iowa, 1838-1839 (Dubuque: Russell and Reeves, Printers, 1839), pp. 69-70.

4 forbade any person from knowingly hiring or harboring a Negro or mulatto who had not complied with Section 1. Strangely enough, the fine levied against such a person was only to be from \$5 to \$100--hardly as stringent as the \$50-\$100 fine awaiting an over-zealous sheriff.

Section 5 secured any slaveholder travelling through the territory from loss of his property, and Section 6 allowed any person claiming ownership of a Negro or mulatto simply to give proof of his claim before a judge or justice of the peace in order to have the Black arrested and delivered to the claimant. These last two articles were to be of decisive importance in a subsequent event involving official Iowa in the slavery controversy, namely the Ralph Case argued before the Territorial Supreme Court.

The Black Code, in the final analysis, was probably not the result of proslavery leanings of the Iowa legislature. It is much more likely that a native sense of racism influenced passage of the repressive law.¹ The significant point in all this is, of course, the realization that racism and proslavery sentiments were not necessarily identical. Indeed there was actually a subtle element of con-

¹Historian Avery Craven also averred this relationship between Black Codes and racism for the more established States he researched. Avery Craven, The Coming of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1942), p. 89.

cern for the rights of Blacks as betrayed in sections 3 and 4.

The so-called "Ralph Case" occurred almost simultaneously with the passage of the Black Code by Iowa, and was just as highly significant in illuminating official slavery attitudes. In the early 1830's a Missouri slave-owner named Montgomery had allowed one of his slaves, known only as Ralph, to come to Iowa and work in the lead mines at Dubuque. An agreement between the two provided that Ralph would save enough from his wages to gradually purchase his freedom. However, the slave could barely earn enough to keep body and soul together, and he naturally defaulted on the payments to his erstwhile master. By 1838 Montgomery had lost patience and hired two slave-catchers to come to Iowa and retrieve his reneging property.¹ Thus the stage was set for a landmark legal battle.

When the news of Ralph's arrest became known, an antislavery Irishman named Alexander Butterworth hurried to obtain a writ of habeas corpus to halt the extradition. The case was soon brought before Thomas S. Wilson, Judge of the District Court of Dubuque and Associate Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court. Apparently sensing the importance of the case for future decisions, Wilson decided to transfer the hearing to a full seating of the Supreme Court the following summer. Therefore, in July of 1839, the simple Black miner found himself standing before the imposing bench of Chief Justice

¹William Salter, Iowa: The First Free State in the Louisiana Purchase (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1905), pp. 242-244.

Charles Mason and his two colleagues.¹

Although how he came to be involved in the case is unknown, the man who represented Ralph was the former Arkansas slave-owner, David Rorer. The defense he offered was most inflammatory for a territory which established historians would label proslavery. In addition to certain legal arguments, Rorer maintained that:

The claimant Montgomery cannot possess any natural right to remove the petitioner to where he may, by the aid of human law, be reduced again to slavery--for such a state is declared to be "repugnant to reason and the principles of Natural Law." (See Blac. Com. Vol. 1st, p. 423.) And still stronger is the language of much earlier and higher authority;--in the divine writings of Moses, it is said, "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee." (22nd chap. Deut. 15th verse.)²

When the evidence was all in, the Court delivered a unanimous decision. As written by Chief Justice Mason, the tribunal ruled that Ralph should be set free. The justices agreed with Rorer that the Black Iowan had been given permission to come to the State, and therefore could not be classified as a fugitive slave.³ Then, if not a fugitive, the Missouri Compromise's ban on slavery in Iowa disallowed any other chance of Montgomery's recovering his slave since "Property, in the slave, cannot exist without the existence of slavery; the pro-

¹Ibid.

²Easton Morris (ed.), Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Iowa, Volume I, 1838-1846 (Iowa City: Silas Foster, 1847), p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 6.

hibition of the latter annihilates the former, and, this being destroyed, he becomes free."¹ As far as the Black Code's provision that a Negro post a certificate of freedom and a \$500 bond, Rorer reasoned successfully that Ralph's residence in Iowa prior to the Code's passage relieved him of this responsibility.²

The legal liberation of Ralph is perhaps more than locally interesting because of the remarkable similarity in form to the Dred Scott appeal before the U. S. Supreme Court eighteen years later. Significantly, Iowa's Supreme Court decided in the slave's favor, whereas the national court did not. This fact alone helps to augment the contention that early Iowa gave substantial evidence of antislavery leanings.

Of course it should be remarked that Chief Justice Mason later allowed for the return of any slave temporarily brought to the territory by his master.³ Yet Rev. William Salter, a neighbor and contemporary of Mason, wrote in his history of Iowa that in 1841 the Judge had privately informed just such a transient slave--one Rachel Bundy--that her master could not return her to a slave-state, and that by crossing onto free soil she had automatically become free.⁴ The Justices's correspondence reveals no particular abolitionist militancy. Indeed, one letter received from an O. S. A. Peck tells of an apparently

¹Ibid., p. 7.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 6.

⁴Salter, Iowa: First Free State, op. cit., p. 244.

shared distaste for abolitionist excesses of men like Salmon Chase; but, on the other hand, he exchanged letters with old friends like John Prentiss who were committed to stopping the advance of the slave system.¹

It could be argued, however, that the case really had no bearing on attitudes regarding slavery, and that it was nothing more than a back-fence squabble. During the time of the Ralph decision there raged a serious boundary dispute between Iowa and Missouri, and thus it is possible to argue that the Court's ruling represented nothing more than a desire to deprive a Missourian of his property.² Yet several factors tend to impugn this argument. First, such motivation does not become judicial robes, and the tribunal would be expected to act accordingly. Furthermore, the Rachel Bundy case of some years later confirms the Ralph case's relevance as a barometer of slavery attitudes. Lastly, the boundary dispute had not yet reached its peak intensity when Ralph was freed, and also, paradoxically, the question

¹The Charles Mason Papers (Des Moines: Iowa Historical Library), Vol. I. See John Prentiss to Charles Mason, April 29, 1847 and O. S. A. Peck to Charles Mason, July 6, 1852.

²Benjamin F. Gue, History of Iowa (New York: The Century History Company, 1903), I, 194; and J. S. Dodds, Original Instructions Governing Public Land Surveys of Iowa (Ames: Iowa Engineering Society, 1943), pp. 423-453.

was even then being arbitrated by Congress.¹

Perhaps a more logical argument against accepting the Ralph case as indicative of wide-spread antislavery sentiment in Iowa could be made if one maintained that the court's decision merely represented the thinking of a three-man minority which just happened to occupy a locus of power. This line of reasoning would hold that the Black Code more accurately indicated official and, probably, unofficial attitudes in early Iowa, since the Code was the creature of an elected, and therefore representative, assembly. Certainly there was no press reaction on either question to give a hint of public opinion--but then the few surviving papers of that period had surprisingly little to say about anything.

¹The eastern terminus of the Iowa-Missouri border, according to an old Indian treaty, was "the rapids of the River Des Moines." This phrase was misleading, however, since there were four possible "rapids" which could have served--though none really deserved the name. In 1836 the Missouri governor appointed a commission to fix his State's northern boundary, and the survey team thus employed picked an obscure rapids just south of Burlington as the treaty's specified site. The result of this selection was that a ten-mile-wide strip of territory Iowans thought to be theirs was suddenly claimed by Missouri. In December of 1839--after the Ralph decision--the slave-state chose to exercise its "authority" in the disputed strip by sending tax collectors into the area. Local citizens responded by jailing the Missourians. Both sides bristled and each chief executive sent troops into the "no-man's-land." Fortunately, this show of force came to nothing and the dispute was peacefully arbitrated. In 1838 Congress had authorized Albert Lea to do an official survey. Though he refused to choose the proper terminus, Lea demonstrated how the four lines could rob Missouri of land if the southern-most rapids was held to be the true one. With this evidence Congress chose the border Iowans had previously accepted. Dodds, loc. cit.

However, if one is seeking antislavery expressions in an elected body, it is only necessary to look forward five years to the debates in the Constitutional Convention of 1844. This elected assembly met to draft a document which would usher Iowa into Statehood. If the body of men selected by their fellow citizens can be considered representative, then their actions relative to the place of the Black in the State were indeed revealing.

Proceedings opened in Iowa City in the summer of 1844, and from the beginning a surprisingly liberal spirit was in evidence. One of the first questions raised in the Convention concerned the status of the Negro. Certain unknown delegates had boldly issued a petition to grant the Black man in Iowa full citizenship--including suffrage. Significantly, this audacious step, occurring a scant five years after the passage of the Black Code, was received as a legitimate subject of debate. The assembly appointed a committee to deliberate upon the question and recommend action. The actual decision of that committee was probably a foregone conclusion, but the obvious honesty and candor of its report tells much about the attitudes of early Iowa on the whole Black problem.

The committee allowed that all men were indeed created equal, and that the concept should apply to Blacks as well as Whites; however, the foregoing was....

a mere abstract proposition, and, although strictly true, when applied to man in a state of nature, yet it becomes very much

modified when man is considered in the artificial state in which government and society places him.¹

Holding the convention to be an attempt by the White population to form a State government and that the members should view it in terms of White self-interest, the committee asked, "Can the negro [sic] be admitted to those privileges [of political citizenship] and not impair the rights of whites?"² It then answered its own question in the negative. The decision it reached maintained that, "the negro [sic] not being a party to the government has no right to partake of its privileges."³

The cynic might say that all this moral philosophizing was irrelevant since the egalitarian and legalizing verbiage served simply as a preamble to yet another expression of racism and proslavery attitudes. Yet the mere fact that the petitions to grant Black suffrage came to the floor and that the convention felt called upon to respond seems highly significant, for a racist assembly would have been better advised to have ignored the whole issue. Then too, it cannot be too strongly noted that the general tenor of the committee report was an open repudiation of the concept of inherent Black inferiority. Actually, it viewed the denial of citizenship to Negroes as an unfortunate, but necessary step to preserve the prerogatives of whites—a position

¹Journal of the Constitutional Convention of 1844 (Iowa City: Jesse Williams, 1845), p.52.

²Ibid., p. 54.

³Ibid.

candidly admitted in the highly illuminating statement which closed the report:

However your committee may commiserate with the degraded condition of the negroes [sic] and feel for his fate, yet we can never consent to open the doors of our beautiful State and invite him to settle in our lands. The policy of the other States would drive the whole black population of the Union upon us.¹

This excerpt rivals Dodge's statement in the clarity with which it delineates the mood of escapism prevalent in early Iowa. The committee admitted certain antislavery leanings, and even a liberal sympathy with the plight of the Black freeman; but it so strongly desired non-involvement in the controversy that it adamantly refused to allow political expression to its more humanitarian tendencies. Accordingly, the Constitution finally adopted by the assembly that summer of 1844 made citizenship a "whites only" proposition after, however, reaffirming in Article II that "neither slavery, nor involuntary servitude, except for the punishment of crimes, shall ever be tolerated in this state."² Article III, section 1 flatly stated that suffrage should be granted only to each "white male citizen."³

As it happened, the voters of Iowa twice rejected this Constitution--once on April 7, 1845 and again on August 4 of that year. Neither slavery nor racism had anything to do with these rejections,

¹Ibid.

²Constitution for the State of Iowa, 1844 (Iowa City: Jesse Williams, 1844), p. 6.

³Ibid.

however. Congress, upon receiving the draft of the document, had altered it by slicing off chunks of territory claimed by the State-to-be, and the local citizenry responded by refusing to accept admission at that price.¹

In the summer of 1846 another convention assembled at Iowa City to prepare a second constitution. This time the delegates did not even admit the question of Black citizenship as a topic of debate. Indeed the journal of that convention recorded that almost every clause pertaining to suffrage was thoroughly discussed except the word "white" in Article III.² The constitution offered by this body all but parroted the previous document, with the only exception being a denial of office to any man who had participated in a duel.³

This time Congress made no attempt to excise land from the applicant. The voters ratified this second Constitution and Iowa became a State. Statehood, however, while representing a change in political status for most Iowans, had little or no effect on popular attitudes. Most citizens of the fledgling State held devoutly to their position of philosophical antislavery convictions paradoxically expressed by "head-in-the-sand" escapism.

¹Dodds, op. cit., p. 453.

²Journal of the Convention of 1846 (Iowa City: Abraham H. Palmer, 1846), pp. 1-20.

³Constitution for the State of Iowa, 1846 (Iowa City: Abraham H. Palmer, 1846), p. 4.

Yet throughout this period of disengagement the foundation of hostility to slavery was being established. A minute but flourishing segment of the State's population disavowed the timidity of its fellow citizens and promoted an open defiance of the Southern institution and everything it stood for. Not surprisingly, this vocal element in Iowa came largely from the religious community.

An example of this religious element was the previously-mentioned village of Salem. Founded in 1835 by a group of Virginia Friends, the little town had always abhorred human bondage; but in 1837 a family came to Salem who constantly put the settlement's beliefs to the test. This was the Frazier clan, led by its dynamic patriarch, Thomas Clarkson Frazier.¹ These new settlers were not satisfied with meekly expressing antislavery sentiments. By 1845 the stridence with which they maintained their militancy had polarized the town into two camps, both hostile to slavery, but in turn hostile to each other. As a result of this schism the town elders expelled the Frazier faction from the community meetinghouse and forced them to set up their own church and burial ground.²

The expulsion, however, merely gave the Frazier group more

¹O. A. Garretson, "Travelling on the Underground Railroad In Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XXII (July, 1924), 420.

²Louis Thomas Jones, op. cit., pp. 140-145.

freedom with which to pursue their aims, and Salem's proximity to the Missouri border predetermined the obvious course of antislavery expression open to the militants--namely, involvement in the Underground Railroad.¹ The record of their participation in this famous system was one of the earliest in the State. Significantly, these URR activities of the vocal element generally met with the cooperative neutrality of their estranged brethren. In other words, even the moderates of Salem expressed militancy, albeit in a passive fashion.

While Salem was going through its schism and self-examination, another hot-bed of antislavery militancy took root about twenty miles to the southeast. In 1838 a genial, but determined, New England parson came to the little community of Denmark to open the first Congregational Church in Iowa.² The parson, Asa Turner, would gradually emerge as one of early Iowa's most influential ecclesiastical and political leaders.

Turner's benign and benevolent personality belied his totally unshakable antislavery militancy. In his earlier pastorate in Quincy, Illinois he constantly faced threats of death for his unbending opposition to the slave system, and on one occasion was recorded as having willfully delivered an abolitionist sermon while a howling mob stoned

¹Ibid., p. 144.

²George F. Magoun, "An Iowa Missionary Patriarch," The Annals of Iowa, III (April, 1897), 56.

the church.¹ In Denmark Turner, like the Fraziers, opened one of the earliest stations on the Underground Railroad.²

The abolitionist parson--and he truly deserved the title "abolitionist"--was clearly the unquestioned head of Congregational councils in Iowa, even after that denomination had sent several other strong-willed pastors into the Territory. As leader of the church Turner naturally used his influence to bring his brethren into the battle against slavery. In 1840 the Congregational Church in the Territory formed the Iowa Association to function as its policy-making and administrative arm. The first meeting inevitably took place in Denmark under the chairmanship of Turner.³

Following the organizational meeting of 1840, the Association turned to regular business at the Second Annual Meeting in 1841. One of its first decisions was to attack Iowa's recently passed Black Code. On November 6, the Committee on the Religious Destitution of the Territory, headed by Turner, reported out the following resolution:

WHEREAS: the laws in relation to blacks and mulattoes are in

¹George F. Magoun, Asa Turner: A Home Missionary Patriarch and His Times (Chicago: Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Company, 1899), p. 160.

²Magoun, "Missionary Patriarch," op. cit., p. 58.

³J. B. Chase (register), Minutes of the General Association of Congregational Churches and Ministers of the State of Iowa: 1840-1875 (Hull, Iowa: Advance Print, 1888), p. 1.

our opinion a violation of the principles of justice and the laws of God; oppressive in their operation on colored persons, and forbidding us arts of humanity; therefore,

RESOLVED: that we invite our churches to unite with us in petitioning for their repeal.¹

Almost as though the implications inherent in the 1841 resolution were not a sufficiently explicit pronouncement of anti-slavery sentiments, Turner led the Iowa Association one step further. On September 15, 1843, during the Fourth Annual Meeting, he chaired a Committee on Slavery which declared:

We regard slavery, as it exists in this country, as a heinous sin, and a gross violation of the laws and Gospel of Christ.... We would call upon our fellow Christians of every name to unite with us to do away with legalized oppression, and lead man to love his fellow man.... We also feel bound in duty to withdraw fellowship from those who profess to be Christians, and still hold their fellowmen in bondage.²

This "withdrawal of fellowship" is reminiscent of Salem's coercing its slaveholding brother into selling his property. However, both cases were far in advance of their time and represent a brand of militancy not quite palatable for most Iowans of that day. Nevertheless, that militancy did exist, and the number who would subscribe to it grew steadily.

Of this subtly growing element of militant antislavery advocates the most easily recognizable was the famous "Iowa Band." This group of eleven graduating students from Andover Theological Seminary had decided to come West to begin their Congregational ministries, as they felt they

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 22.

were most needed there.¹ Praying for guidance in a darkened library, the pilgrims felt called to the farthest frontier settlements. Dismissing such possibilities as Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin as too settled, and therefore not in great need, the debate centered on Missouri and Iowa. In eliminating the former the following dialogue purportedly took place:

"Well, then, Missouri," says one.

"But Missouri is a slave state."

"No matter, they need the Gospel there if it is."

"Yes, but if there are places outside of slavery just as needy, why not go where we can labor to the best advantage?"

"Well, Iowa then,--What say you to the new Territory of Iowa?"²

Obviously the Iowa Band subscribed to the philosophy of Asa Turner, who was soon to become their spiritual father. Yet, despite their "darkened library" dedication, their surviving papers and diaries shed little light on their antislavery activities, especially in the early years. Of the entire group, only William Salter betrayed much in the way of militancy.

Salter, from the first, spoke out against slavery. His sentiments showed up from the pulpit and in his letters. Probably the

¹The eleven were Alden B. Robbins, Daniel Lane, Edwin B. Turner, William Salter (biographer of James W. Grimes and an early historian of Iowa), Harvey Adams, Ephraim Adams (biographer of the Iowa Band), Ebenezer Alden, James J. Hill, Erastus Ripley, Horace Hutchinson, and Benjamin Spaulding.

²Ephraim Adams, The Iowa Band (Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1899), p. 12.

truest representation of his feelings came in his intense correspondence with his fiancée, Mary Ann MacKintire, of Charlestown, Massachusetts between 1845 and 1846. His many remarks on the agitation over the controversy reveal a deeply troubled mind. He knew where he stood on the question, but he recognized also the possible implication of a forceful application of his ideals to his personal life. On January 1, 1846, he wrote Mary Ann that he did not like the monomaniacal self-righteousness of some of his colleagues, noting that "though an abolitionist, God forbid that I should make opinions different from mine a test of ministerial fellowship."¹

Yet, when he summed up his position in a letter dated June 22, 1846, he decided that:

Time is only necessary to bring our churches and voluntary associations to withdraw fellowship from slave holders. That event must come, not that to hold a slave is in itself and necessarily and in all cases a sin, but that the evils of the system are so great that all good men are required to renounce it altogether.... It will be a great advance when our ministers refuse to go to Southern churches on the condition of utter silence on the subject of slavery. But my ideas are crude, and though I am pretty well settled in them, I don't pretend to be unwilling to learn.²

Obviously Salter should be classified exactly as he described himself, and abolitionist. Yet just as obviously there was an element

¹William Salter Papers (Des Moines: Iowa Historical Library), Vol. II, MacKintire Letters, p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 129.

of uncertainty in the young parson which probably typified to some extent the larger mood of Iowa's incoming population. The pioneer land-seekers were simply not that sure of their stand on slavery, or rather they were not sure of the course which their position seemed to demand of them. So, to avoid taking action, they fled to any haven they could find, and Iowa seemed to suit that purpose.¹

But the Congregational clerics were not among those seeking a refuge. Most came to labor, and for many labor equaled moral warfare against slavery. In 1848 another New England parson arrived in Iowa to open a church. Rev. John Todd came to Tabor in the southwest corner of the State. In his autobiography Todd recalled the trip up the Missouri River on a steamboat, and the violent denunciation he faced when he told a fellow-passenger "that the slaves in our country had a much better reason for rising and fighting for their freedom than our fathers ever had."² Iowa obviously had another fire-brand on its hands.

Though members of the Iowa Band, except for Salter, put little

¹It should be noted, however, that escape from slavery was probably only a secondary motive for immigration. Land hunger was always the prime consideration and antislavery sentiments merely contributed a sense of direction for the move.

²John Todd, Early Settlement and Growth of Western Iowa, or Reminiscences (Des Moines: Historical Department of Iowa, 1906), pp. 55-56.

evidence of their antislavery idealism on display, Todd was not so timid. Once the Congregational Church of Tabor opened, the militant cleric instituted a monthly antislavery concert every fourth Monday evening.¹ Yet even that did not content him, for Todd constantly placed Tabor in the forefront of every phase of antislavery militancy exhibited in Iowa, including some of doubtful legality.

However, militancy in the antislavery movement did not really begin until 1854. In its history prior to that year Iowa vacillated between its two dominant desires--to escape and to conciliate. Almost every event touching upon slavery during those years held elements of one or both of these two drives. Even the greatest single expression of antislavery in the pre-1854 Statehood period, the Salem fugitive slave case, ultimately demonstrated Iowa's dilemma.

Sometime around June 2, 1848, nine slaves owned by a Ruel Daggs of Clark County, Missouri escaped and made their way north into Iowa. Two slave-catchers named Slaughter and McClure came in hot pursuit, and cornered the runaways in the woods a mile south of Salem. The captors seized their quarry and began retracing their steps toward Missouri when they were stopped by three militant Quakers, Thomas Clarkson Frazier, Elihu Frazier and William Johnson. Whether they were there by chance or design, the latter of which is easily the more probable, is not known; but their subsequent actions and Salem's response

¹Ibid., pp. 97-98.

reveal clearly the depth of antislavery hostility in the little Quaker community.¹

One of the three demanded that the Negroes be taken to the Justice of the Peace at Salem to be identified as fugitives before being returned to Missouri; but another was more direct, vowing that he would "wade in Missouri blood before the Negroes should be taken."² Outnumbered and in a strange State, Slaughter and McClure surrendered to the demand of the court appearance.

The melee that followed was almost too outrageously farcical to be believed were it not documented. While the party advanced toward town, news of their impending arrival somehow preceded them and Salem turned out en masse. Slaughter later reported that the town was "unanimous" that he not return the slaves to Daggs.³ This alone is arresting since the community was supposedly divided between "militants" and "moderates." At any rate the townspeople surrounded the slave-catchers, issuing threats and insults, and in the confusion several of the slaves simply vanished into the crowd.⁴

When the remaining party reached Salem the office of Justice of the Peace Nelson Gibbs proved too small for the would-be audience. Therefore, the harried Missourians were forced to face the ultimate

¹Louis Thomas Jones, op. cit., pp. 189-191.

²George Frazee (ed.), Fugitive Slave Case: Ruel Daggs vs. Elihu Frazier et. al. (Burlington: Morgan and McKenny, 1850), p.6.

³Ibid., p. 7. ⁴Louis Thomas Jones, loc. cit.

irony of having their hearing moved to the Fraziers' Abolition Meeting House.¹ In the tumultuous examination Slaughter and McClure admitted that they had no warrants while Gibbs decided he had no jurisdiction. In the general bedlam another Quaker, Paul Way, led one party of slaves to waiting horses, and Thomas Frazier took those remaining to his home. Several days later an armed force of Missourians numbering somewhere between seventy and three hundred, depending upon whose estimate one accepts, descended upon Salem. An intense search followed, but the slaves had been carefully hidden.²

The dramatic, or perhaps melodramatic, affair at Salem might be misleading, however, since the Quaker village was definitely not representative of Iowa as a whole in 1848. Even Salem's moderates would have been considered militant by the standards of most Iowans. Furthermore, the press of the State was all but unanimous in its condemnation of the town's action. One paper described it as "an act of aggressionand in wanton violation of the laws of the land."³ Another, disposed to some leniency, still noted that "individual opinion in regard to certain laws, afford no excuse for the violation of those laws."⁴

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³The Des Moines Valley Whig /Keokuk/, July 16, 1848.

⁴The Keokuk Register, June 15, 1848.

The best Salem could achieve in the press it seemed was not to be mentioned at all. In the highly partisan journalism of the day, party alignment was irrelevant on this issue.

However, press censure and the Missourians' search were not the last chapters in the Daggs affair. In 1850 the slave-owner brought suit in Federal Court at Burlington against those most closely involved in his loss of slaves. Daggs sought \$10,000 in damages as compensation for his missing chattels. Strangely enough, he chose the avowed antislavery lawyer, David C. Rorer, to represent him. In defense of the attorney's appearance on the Southern side of the moral issue at this time it can only be said that Rorer's case for Daggs lacked the vigor and passion of his defense of Ralph. Moreover, he presented Constitutional rather than ethical arguments. The Frazier faction was represented by J. C. Hall and J. T. Morton.

From the beginning the conduct of the trial exhibited a "kid-gloves" approach--an evaluation strengthened by Judge J. J. Dyer's commendation to counsel for handling an explosive suit with dignity and restraint.¹ During the proceedings most witnesses seemed reluctant to take a definite stand on the town's actions, and many maintained that Slaughter and McClure had never documented their claims. While Hall and Morton hammered home this last point, Rorer just elicited what sketchy testimony he could.

¹Frazee, op. cit., p. 34.

When Hall summed up the defense for the jury he argued three points. First, he maintained that no evidence had been offered to prove that the nine Negroes found in Salem actually belonged to Daggs. Secondly, no proof was put forward that Slaughter and McClure were authorized agents of Daggs, and therefore the defendants could hardly be guilty of hindering the slave-owner from recovering his property. Then, finally, Hall emphasized that no testimony had demonstrated that Way and Frazier made any overt attempt to entice the Blacks to follow them.¹ In actual fact Hall was completely correct in all these contentions.

Rorer made no move to counter any of these defense arguments. His case simply consisted of taking Slaughter's testimony, casually cross-examining a few witnesses, then placing his client's claim before the jury. On sheer merit there were enough loop-holes in the plaintiff's case for any jury with antislavery tendencies to dismiss the suit if they so desired. But this jury did not dismiss it. After only two hours of deliberation they returned with a \$2900 award for Daggs.² On the surface it appears that the Burlington jury had proslavery sympathies. However, Rorer's plea to them offers another interpretation.

David Rorer was a man of his time. Like many Iowans he had come to free-soil territory partly to escape contact with the slavery question. But for the previous four years Iowa had been a State, and as such it had assumed certain responsibilities to the country. It was bound in law to

¹Ibid., pp. 14-19.

²Ibid., p. 40.

its fellow States and shared the common heritage of the U. S. Constitution. Much as Rorer might detest slavery and desire to escape it, there came times, as in the Daggs case, when it forced itself upon the conscientious citizen. At such times sectional angers flared and antislavery men like Rorer were forced to choose between their desire to strike out at a system they abhorred and their desire to preserve the harmony of the Union. Reluctantly they chose the Union. The moral duty demanded by the Constitution overrode their ethical hostility to slavery. To save the Union from further discord they chose to conciliate the South in obedience to the legal contract which united them. Along with Senator Dodge they seemed to say, "Just so far as Blacks have entered into the Constitution we are for them."

Conciliation and constitutionality, then, framed Rorer's whole attack. He candidly told the jury that the known facts of the case were patently obvious and there could be no begging the question. Therefore, Iowans, as citizens of a responsible State, had a duty to live up to the legal contract, the U. S. Constitution, which they knowingly had accepted; and that contract recognized slavery. Placing the decision in clear philosophic perspective for the jury, Rorer asked:

Shall we now repudiate the contract we have made--shall we be the first to violate it? Shall we affirm that there is a moral law above this, and that we must obey it at all hazards? Shall we be permitted to prate about morals and sympathy with canting hypocrits or maddened fanatics, when we ourselves sanctioned the

institution of slavery by entering, with full knowledge, into a contract of which it forms a part.¹

It seems obvious that Rorer recognized a general antislavery feeling in the jury, and that he forced them to see beyond the question of the case to the higher legal duty of abiding by the Constitution.

The Daggs decision gave but the first indication of how seriously involved Iowa was in the moral dilemma of antislavery vs. union. No matter how hard it tried to escape the vortex of the controversy surrounding slavery, it inevitably drew Iowa in. On the local scene the nearness of Missouri gave the free-state the problem of dealing with fugitive slaves. On the national level sectional discord riddled the two chambers of Congress and constantly forced Iowa to take sides. Until 1854 it continued to choose the course of conciliation based upon constitutionality, but it was becoming a progressively less satisfying choice since conciliation only seemed to whet the appetite of sectional interests.

No single piece of national legislation demonstrated Iowa's dilemma more graphically than the Compromise of 1850. These famous enactments were but one more futile effort to soothe sectional hostility and ease tensions. Among other things the Compromise was a series of bills dealing with lands gained in the Mexican War. The Missouri

¹Ibid., p. 25.

Compromise thirty years earlier had set a 35° 30' line between slave and free territory, but extension of that line proved impossible when California applied for admission to Statehood with a free-soil constitution. California lay well below the old compromise line. In the storm of sectional reaction which followed, Henry Clay offered a proposal to end the controversy. California would be accepted on her own terms, which naturally pleased the North; a new, all-encompassing fugitive slave law would be enacted as a concession to the South; and most importantly, the remainder of the old Mexican Empire would be divided without respect to slavery. In other words, the new territories were to decide on slavery for themselves according to the nature of their settlement. By this concept, dubbed "squatter sovereignty," Clay hoped to short-circuit future sectional hostility over parcelling out land.¹

The idea of letting the people of the distant western settlements decide the slavery question for themselves naturally satisfied most Iowans. Not only was it democratic, but also the area was geographically so far removed from the State as to really matter little. Therefore the old Wilmot Proviso which sought to ban slavery in the new territories could be comfortably dismissed. Of course the fugitive slave law was less acceptable, but Iowa preferred not having runaway Blacks around to bother its conscience, and the new law might discourage Negroes from making the break for freedom. Then too, the new law did no

¹"Compromise of 1850," Encyclopedia Americana (International Edition), VII, 451-452.

more than update an old one the South had always used. Besides, it was a cheap price to pay to restore harmony in the harried Union, and harmony remained something Iowa wanted most desperately. As Senator Jones said before casting his affirmative vote:

Under no circumstances will I consent to interfere with [slavery] where the Constitution and laws of my country have placed it. More than that! I will not vote for insulting enactments, nor lend myself to harass or excite the fears of those amongst whom it exists.¹

Press reaction in Iowa seemed generally favorable. The ordinarily highly partisan Whig and Democratic organs in the State displayed basic unanimity on the Compromise of 1850. The picture was complicated, however, by the fact that some Southerners opposed the Compromise on the grounds that squatter sovereignty would be exploited by Northern migrations and, therefore, the North would get the better of the deal even despite the fugitive slave law. As a result, an Iowa editor could express pro-Compromise attitudes while exhibiting open hostility to the South:

The fanaticism of the North received a death blow when the territorial bills without the Wilmot Proviso passed. The second thought will bring both parties in the South to their senses. If it does not, hanging will, and we hope it will be dealt out to them.²

¹Congressional Globe, op. cit., p. 1716.

²Andrew Western Democrat, October 2, 1850.

However, most papers seemed unequivocally pleased with the passage, agreeing with the editor who wrote:

This news brings peace to the country, and restores good will and fraternal feeling where before there was discord and ill-suppressed and even vindictive hatred. The spirit of Patriotism has triumphed over that spirit of Disunion and Civil Strife which had taken possession of a few demagogues in the North and at the South.¹

Only one ominous note interrupted the general accord on the Compromise. At the tenth Annual Meeting of the Iowa Association in June of 1850, Asa Turner pushed through another "testimony upon slavery" which openly challenged the currently debated fugitive slave law. The Association maintained that:

The principles of civil and religious liberty forbid our acknowledging the right of property in man, or the obligation of any law requiring us to aid in the delivering up of fugitives from oppression.²

This "testimony" all but invited Congregationalists to join the Underground Railroad, an invitation that many of the brethren were later to accept. However, in 1850 Turner was, as usual, somewhat ahead of his time.

Finally, there were two more items which reflected Iowa's pre-1854 racial attitudes and which thus deserve brief mention. In February of 1851 the legislature codified existing legal practices into one

¹Des Moines Weekly Courier, September 13, 1850.

²Chase, op. cit., p. 63.

volume. In chapter 130, section 2388, on "Evidence," the new code declared that any person capable of understanding the obligation of an oath could give evidence, except that "an Indian, a negro [sic], a mulatto, or a black person shall not be allowed to give testimony in any cause wherein a white person is a party."¹

The second event occurred in antislavery Tabor, John Todd's pastorate. In 1850 a Negro family named Garner came to town. They apparently were pleasant and industrious people who had worked hard to purchase their freedom, and then came to a free-state to enjoy it. The humanitarian Rev. Todd naively invited the Garner's children to attend both day school and Sunday School, and they cheerfully accepted. At that point the presumptuous cleric learned just how deep Tabor's liberality ran, for, as he described it:

Immediately up bounded the race question, which was soon practically solved by the incendiary burning of the school house, the only place in the entire settlement where either school or meeting could be held.²

Neither case, however, involved any particular proslavery sentiment. The Black testimony law represented nothing more than a vestigial carry-over from the racism expressed in the Black Code of eleven years previous. As for the school burning, it was obviously a racist matter

¹The Code of Iowa, 1851 (Iowa City: Palmer and Paul, State Printers, 1851; reprint Des Moines: Emery H. English, State Printer, 1912), p. 239.

²Todd, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

since Tabor had a known antislavery reputation.

In total then, Iowa's pre-1854 history exhibited the conscious desire of its citizenry to escape contact with slavery and the Negro, despite basic antislavery leanings. Iowans therefore resented abolitionists because they interfered with this escapism. Yet, when forced to come to grips with the Black problem, Iowa was ethically torn. Where possible it would prefer expressing its more humanitarian side; but if pushed too far the free-state would safely join the forces of conciliation and legality against the urgings of its conscience. Such choices, of course, were always painful and it wished not to make them.

However, conciliation proved an inadequate course in the long run. It had a way of demanding more and more of the soul of anti-slavery Iowans. Finally, in 1854, the conciliators asked too much. The Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed and the whole foundation upon which Iowa had built its escapist haven crumbled before it. The Missouri Compromise was repealed.

CHAPTER III

KANSAS-NEBRASKA AND JAMES GRIMES: THE TURNING POINT

In one of those rare examples of historical irony, Iowa's conciliatory Senator A. C. Dodge opened the door on the act which ended his State's uneasy aloofness toward the slavery question. At the same time he unleashed the forces at home which were to topple him from his premier position on the political ladder of Iowa. Oddly enough, Dodge had no notion of what lay ahead, but rather was stigmatized by a situation which simply got beyond his control.

On December 14, 1853, Iowa's senior senator introduced a bill to organize the Territory of Nebraska. This had long been one of the dearest projects of Dodge's fellow Democrat and political ally, Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois. Yet it was natural that an Iowan should introduce the bill, since it would put civilization on his State's western border and thus end the War Department's policy of using the area as a dumping-ground for Indians. Then too, since Douglas dreamed of putting a railroad through that area, Dodge knew that Iowa would also be crossed by the route. However, Douglas' objective had always eluded him because of the concerted opposition of the South. They naturally wanted no part of yet another free-state in the Union, as the Missouri Compromise provided that Nebraska should be. Also, Southerners wanted any American expansion, including railroads,

directed toward the Southwest.¹

All evidence, therefore, pointed to Dodge's bill meeting the same fate as all his colleague's attempts; but this time Douglas moved to stymie Southern objections by offering them a proposition they could not refuse. From his position as Chairman of the Committee on Territories the Illinois Senator revised Dodge's bill so that it came out with an article allowing squatter sovereignty on the slavery issue to be applied to certain areas of the Louisiana Purchase. Specifically, it proposed the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and offered slave-owners access to the newly-created Kansas and Nebraska Territories with their human chattels.² As a result these areas would be open to the expansion of the slave system just as the old Mexican lands had been by the Compromise of 1850. In short, the Kansas-Nebraska Bill simply sought to extend the previous compromise, and all the rhetorical moralizing about sovereignty of the people which Clay's bill had elicited applied equally to Douglas' proposal. But Iowa was not to be soothed by such conscience-salving bromides this time.

When Iowa had chosen to be conciliatory and support the Compromise of 1850, it had done so knowing that squatter sovereignty might conceivably allow for the expansion of slavery into new, but distant territory. However, if slavery spread to the Southwest at least it

¹Albert Watkins, "Kansas Nebraska Bill," Encyclopedia Americana (International Edition), XVI, 301-303.

²Ibid.

would not intrude upon Iowa's aloofness from the problem, and perhaps it would quiet the incessant sectional bickering.

Whatever Iowa's earlier ambivalence, the whole structure of moral noninvolvement came tumbling down when Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in May of 1854. Now the free-state might very possibly find slavery on two of its borders instead of one. All that its conciliation of the South had done was to forge the weapon whereby the South had destroyed the main prop of Iowa's isolation, the Missouri Compromise line. Missouri's runaway slaves had already pricked Iowa's uneasy conscience; a slave-state to the west would make confrontation inescapable. It was little wonder the free-state population felt betrayed. In fact, with the old compromise repealed, there was nothing but Iowa's own amenable constitution to keep slavery from entering into the State itself. Of course few Iowans probably took such an eventuality seriously, yet such was their anger that they listened willingly to leading political figures who sounded the alarm over the possibility.

The State responded immediately, and perhaps predictably, to the bill's passage by entering into the slavery controversy with a vengeance. The same Iowa which had given a slave-owner a favorable judgment against some of its own citizens, which had codified an anti-Negro testimony provision, and which had endorsed a compromise supposedly congenial to slave interests, would no longer play the constitutionalist appeaser. The State had gone against its inherent antislavery conscience and was

now expected to watch the institution move into the house next door. This time Iowans would have none of it. They would fight back--and even legality would not overly concern them.

This new strident militancy aroused by Kansas-Nebraska resulted not from any dramatic shift in population make-up over the four-year span between 1850 and 1854. Rather Iowa's natural antislavery tendencies had surfaced concomitantly with the repudiation of constitutional restraint. Quite frankly Iowans had tried to fulfill their moral duty to their national contract, but in doing so they had netted nothing. Now, with the pragmatic spur of self-interest in regard to the settlement of their neighboring territories, they would set aside the fine points of constitutionality and listen more sympathetically to the arguments of antislavery advocates.

This reversal appeared most strikingly in the press reaction to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The overwhelming majority of editors villified the enactment both before and after passage. Of the surviving papers available only three came out in favor of it, and all three were strongly Democratic and strongly pro-Douglas. Even so, those three gave it halfhearted and rather vague support at best. One of the editors who rejoiced at the passing of the bill claimed that his happiness stemmed from the fact that "the agony is now over."¹ Another defended, rather than endorsed, the bill by saying that its opponents were "a small minority....who are motivated by a morbid philanthropy."² The

¹The [Bloomfield] Western Gazette, June 3, 1854.

²Dubuque Weekly Miners' Express, February 8, 1854.

third soberly and philosophically based his defense on the virtues of squatter sovereignty:

We are in favor of that bill with all its provisions. We believe a failure to adopt that section which allows the people of the territories to decide for themselves as the states now do, would be an evidence of great instability on the part of our government and would endanger the country by opening again the question which has been the constant fear of union lovers of our whole country.¹

Not all Democratic papers favored the bill, of course, even though, as intensely partisan party organs, they could have been expected to back it. Those who opposed it were typically casual about their stand. One editor exemplified this attitude when he characterized the bill as an undoubted "error," but allowed that "the country will survive it."²

The Whig press, as could be expected, had a field day. The Democratic Party controlled both the national and State governments, and Iowans held that party accountable for the hated act. One editor, following the bill's preliminary clearance by Congress, intoned:

The deed is a dark one. It will follow those who have committed it through the remainder of the time they are to live in this world. We leave them in the hands of an outraged People and a just God.³

¹The Ft. Des Moines Iowa Star, March 9, 1854.

²Dubuque Daily Miners' Express, February 20, 1854.

³The Jackson County Press Maquoketa, March 15, 1854.

This set the general tone of the criticism. A second editor labeled Kansas-Nebraska "a breach of faith with the North."¹ Another protested that "already the United States have enough of this evil of slavery; therefore, let it be confined to its present limits, if possible."²

But the most significant of all editorial villifications were those from papers which had supported the Compromise of 1850. The best example of this latter element was the Des Moines Weekly Courier. In 1850 it had been the paper which had rejoiced that "the spirit of Patriotism has triumphed over that spirit of Disunion and Civil Strife which had taken possession of a few demagogues in the North and at the South."³ By 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Act had changed that paper's tune:

We are no abolitionist, but we are one of those that believe that southern rights are no better than northern rights, and that we should not, whenever they desire to extend the area of slavery, bow the knee.⁴

Finding Iowa's press largely ranged against the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and Iowans up in arms, it was inevitable that some one would make political capital of the situation, especially as 1854 was an election

¹The Des Moines Valley Whig /Keokuk/, February 3, 1854.

²The Fairfield Weekly Ledger, March 2, 1854.

³See above, p. 48.

⁴The Des Moines Weekly Courier, February 16, 1854.

year. With the Democratic Party so closely tied to the hated piece of legislation, most eyes in Iowa turned to the Whigs. Always the minority party in the State, the Whigs had been crushed in the election of 1852. Kansas-Nebraska gave them a chance to "come out of the political wilderness," and so they did. Ironically, the election of 1854 was also the event of the party's demise, for within two years its young "Moses" had defected to the new Republican camp and had taken the State with him. This emergent leader was the intense, anti-slavery lawyer from Burlington, James W. Grimes, and much of Iowa's political history for the next decade would revolve about him.

In early February of 1854, during the debate of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in Congress, the Whig Party of Iowa held its largest--and its last--political convention. Casting aside the old faces of the party, it chose instead the articulate Grimes.¹ Obviously Douglas' act would serve as the central issue, and Grimes rarely deviated from that target. From the time he climbed on the stump until he left the State House for the U. S. Senate in 1857, the Kansas-Nebraska question consumed his energies.

But Grimes was to be more than a Whig candidate--a fact which may partly explain his defection to the Republicans. In point of fact many Whigs were unable to stomach his more militant antislavery posi-

¹William Salter, The Life of James W. Grimes, With His Collected Correspondence (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1876), p. 33.

tions, and therefore were not prepared to back him strongly.¹ Almost at once Grimes began seeking out men of his persuasion. William Penn Clarke, a devoted antislavery politician, became one of the first to ally himself to his party's candidate in a closer bond than political necessity would demand. Grimes wrote specifically for his help on April 3, 1854, and Clarke quickly responded.² Others, like D. C. Cloud and J. W. Cattell also joined. The single tie which bound them all was their unbending antislavery philosophy.

However, these men would have more or less joined Grimes' campaign in any case. More important was the alliance he formed with the Denmark cleric, Asa Turner, who had emerged as one of the leading figures in the Free Soil Party of Iowa. The party was small but morally influential in the State, and its support would mean a good deal to the Whig nominee.

On March 28, 1854, the Free Soil Convention opened in Crawfordsville with Denmark's Isaac Field presiding.³ Turner's confidant and future biographer, George Magoun, attended the convention with the parson and recorded the proceedings. He described the conclave as both

¹Herriott, Grimes Vs Southrons, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

²James W. Grimes of Burlington, Iowa to William Penn Clarke of Iowa City, Iowa, April 3, 1854, William Penn Clarke Papers (Des Moines: State Historical Library), Vol. 1, no. 130.

³Salter, Grimes, op. cit., p. 23.

troubled and tumultuous. Grimes' nomination by the Whigs had stolen Free Soil thunder, yet they were not completely satisfied as to his antislavery credentials. While the confused debate rumbled on, Turner, who had been appointed chairman of the platform committee, busied himself drafting the solution to the whole problem. The platform he submitted was probably one of the most succinct on record:

Whereas: (1), the Nebraska bill is the great question of national politics, and

Whereas: (2), the Maine Law [a prohibition act] is the great question of state politics; therefore

Resolved, that we will vote for James W. Grimes of Des Moines County for governor.¹

This pithy document obviously struck the fancy of the convention and helped break the tension. Then, later that same day, an unpublished letter from Grimes arrived, and the Free Soil Party gave the Whig lawyer its endorsement.² Thus, with one convulsive upheaval the Kansas-Nebraska Act had totally realigned politics in Iowa. Though still marching under old political banners, the new orders in Iowa were actually made up of free-soil and antislavery adherents ranged against a confused and uncomfortable agglomeration of proslavers and old-line conciliators--the latter being a dwindling element. Although still unwilling to express itself openly, antislavery militance was at last breaking out in Iowa.

On April 8, 1854, Grimes issued a broadside explaining his posi-

¹Magoun, Asa Turner, op. cit., p. 287.

²Ibid.

tion in the coming campaign. Partly candid, partly a blatant appeal to local hysteria, and partly political pettifogery, the broadside is one of Iowa's most remarkable historical documents. It opened by noting that, should the Missouri Compromise be repealed, both Kansas and Nebraska would be flooded with slaveholders. Then came a most significant appraisal of Iowa's situation:

If there is one State in the Union more interested than another in the maintenance of the Missouri Compromise, it is the State of Iowa. With a free, enterprising population on the west, our State will be vastly benefited by an early organization of Nebraska. With a slave State on our western border, I see nothing but trouble and darkness in the future. Bounded on two sides by slave States, we shall be intersected with underground railroads, and shall be continually distracted by slave hunts. Instead of having a population at the west who will sympathize with us, we shall find their sympathies and interests constantly antagonistic to ours.¹

Besides indicating that Grimes believed his State to be basically antislavery, the foregoing statement reveals that he felt he could play upon Iowa's fears. Later in the position paper he made a more obvious appeal:

I sincerely believe that, should the Missouri Compromise be repealed, there will soon be a contest for the mastery between freedom and slavery on the soil of Iowa. The principle of non-intervention so strenuously contended for by the South will soon be extended to the free States of the Northwest.²

But perhaps the most significant section of the whole broadside came in his brusque dismissal of the charge that he was an abolitionist:

I am aware that for entertaining these opinions of the Nebraska question, and for fearlessly expressing them, I am denounced in some quarters as an abolitionist. I heed not the senseless charge. It

¹Salter Papers, op. cit., Vol. II, n.n.

²Ibid.

is too late in the day for any man to be deterred from expressing his opinions by the mad-dog cry of abolitionism. I do not attempt or desire to interfere with slavery in the slave-holding States. I am content that the slaveholders of the South may possess their slaves, and be responsible for their control over them to their own laws, and to their own consciences. I will not even presume to judge them. But, with the blessing of God, I will war and war continually against the abandonment to slavery of a single foot of soil now consecrated to freedom..... And I here declare that whilst I am as anxious as any man, for the speedy organization of the new Territories, yet I will not only everywhere and at all times oppose their organization under a bill allowing the introduction of slavery, but should the present bill pass, I will advocate its repeal and oppose the admission of Nebraska and Kansas into the Union as slave states.¹

This passage is highly provocative on several counts. Though Grimes denied being an abolitionist, the fact remains that the charge did not particularly disturb him. Also, the broadside firmly established a position which Iowa officially adopted from that point right on down to the Civil War--namely, "slavery where it exists, but not one inch further." More importantly, this pronouncement was the first by a major political figure in Iowa to imply an open abhorrance of slavery. The State now began the process of choosing its future course, and once chosen that course would become a crusade.

If Grimes' statements occasionally sound rather paranoic, especially that fearful cry that slavocracy might invade Iowa, it can only be said that tensions ran high and that such declarations merely reflected those tensions. Beyond that there is the fact that some of his more flamboyant predictions proved surprisingly prophetic. For example,

¹Ibid.

at the time there would probably have been many scoffers at the notion that Iowa would become "intersected with underground railroads;" yet that is precisely what happened. Prior to 1854 hostility to the return of fugitive slaves centered mainly in Quaker Salem and Yankee Denmark, at least in so far as the later admissions of involved personnel indicate such hostility.¹ Even in those towns the URR activity was unspecific and undocumented, with the exception of the Daggs' affair. But 1854 was the year of decision. Every county history with URR involvement to record, dates the opening of its stations at that year or just after it. 1854 is so recurrent that it defies the long arm of coincidence.

Even so noted an antislavery town as Tabor did not begin URR work until the year of Kansas-Nebraska. In an interview of 1903, one of John Todd's deacons, S. H. Adams, reported that he had had four fellow citizens help him in abetting the escape of five slaves from a transient Mormon family on July 4, 1854.² This is but one of many available examples of 1854 Underground Railroad openings.

In November of this pivotal year Grimes carried the state, and his Whig-Free Soil coalition took a majority into the State Assembly.³

¹Garretson, op. cit., p. 420.

²"First Excursion Over the Tabor and Northern," reprint, Des Moines Register and Leader, March 15, 1914.

³Grimes defeated his Democratic opponent 23,325 to 21,202. Harlan, op. cit., p. 334.

On December 9, 1854 he gave his inaugural address before the new legislature. If it is a political truism that vituperative campaign oratory yields to statesmanlike deliverances following the election, then Grimes proved to be the rare exception. His speech only clarified his basic hostility both to slavery and to the implications of the Kansas-Nebraska Act:

Slavery is a local institution, depending wholly on State laws for its existence and continuance. Freedom being the natural condition of all men, and no authority being delegated to the General Government to establish or protect slavery, Congress can pass no law establishing or protecting it in the territories.¹

The new Governor of Iowa was obviously sincere about his antislavery leanings, and all but proclaimed himself a force to contend with in the future.

In point of fact, Grimes, was, if anything, somewhat more militant than even his public pronouncements revealed him to be; perhaps even militant enough to be classed as an abolitionist, despite his disclaimers. For several years the Burlington lawyer-politician had carried on an extensive correspondence with Salmon P. Chase--that national figure whom Charles Mason's correspondent thought to be an avowed abolitionist.² Included in this extensive exchange was that highly provocative letter excerpted by Herriott which purported to demonstrate a large element of proslavery sentiment in Iowa.³

¹Salter, Grimes, op. cit., p. 61.

²See above, pp. 25-26.

³See above, p. 9.

On October 3, 1854, Grimes did indeed write Chase that he believed that, "The southern half of our State is strongly pro-slavery...."¹ But the impact of this peculiar statement is ameliorated by two considerations: first, Grimes wrote the letter just prior to his election as governor on an unconditional free-soil platform; and secondly, when taken as a whole the letter reveals a condition in the State exactly the opposite of what the carefully edited excerpt portrays:

The southern half of our State is strongly pro-slavery, but I think we will be able to carry a majority with us for free principles, and for a disconnection with slavery. The Whigs are just now learning that it does not hurt them to be called "abolitionists," "wooly-heads," etc., and, when the great contest of 1856 comes on, they will be prepared for and callous to such epithets. The north third of our State will be to Iowa, politically, what the Western Reserve is to the State of Ohio. No man can obtain the electoral vote of Iowa, in 1856, who was in favor of the passage of the Nebraska bill, and who will not favor the repeal of the "Fugitive Slave Law."²

As a whole, this ambiguous letter, rather than indicating a substantial proslavery sentiment in Iowa, reveals a majority for the opposing position. One can only wonder if Grimes' use of the term "pro-slavery" did not refer to someone not quite as militant as himself.³

On November 13, 1854, Chase answered Grimes' letter, and in doing

¹Salter, Grimes, op. cit., p. 54.

²Ibid.

³In any event Herriott clearly used questionable methodology when he lifted those two provocative statements from the context of an important historical document.

so he showed plainly that he thought the Iowan to be something more than a moderate free-soiler:

It does me good to think that a New Hampshire boy /N. H. was the native state of both Grimes and Chase/, and a Governor of a Western State, will have the honor of being the first to lay down the great principle on which the slavery question must be finally settled, if peacefully settled at all.¹

Clearly, Chase was thinking the unthinkable--that the confrontation between slavery and freedom might necessarily become violent. It is significant that he should share these thoughts with Grimes, and that doing so did not seem to bother the Iowan or cool his alliance with his Ohio mentor.

Of course Chase was ultimately correct, the confrontation would be violent. But Bull Run was not really the first bloody field of the "irrepressible conflict," rather the plains of Kansas were to have that dubious honor. When it became obvious that slavery and antislavery would battle for supremacy in the Kansas Territory, Iowa stood hopelessly in the middle. As Missouri became the natural highway of the slavocracy into the contested area, so Iowa hosted the antislavery migration. And there, willingly in the thick of it, was Iowa's James W. Grimes. His name would head the roster of political leaders in the great free-soil movement.

Meanwhile, as Grimes personified the officialdom's efforts, another name soon emerged which gave identity to the non-political ele-

Ibid., p. 55.

ment of the struggle. This non-politico did not even hail from Iowa, yet his every action seemed to touch the free-state's course and influence its history. His name was John Brown.

CHAPTER IV

IOWA POLITICS SWING ANTISLAVERY: 1855-1860

The six years between Grimes' first election as governor and the outbreak of the Civil War were active and vital ones for Iowa. The old aura of uncertainty and vacillation had disappeared. The Kansas-Nebraska Act had finally awakened Iowa to the need of facing the slavery controversy, and in the flurry of activity of those six years it appeared that the State was trying to make up for lost time.

But the Kansas-Nebraska Act did more than arouse Iowa from the torpor intendent upon its former conciliation. The drama which followed the settlement of Kansas also focused and directed Iowa's initial activities in the antislavery crusade. Indeed Kansas served as a vast stage upon which a kind of morality play was being acted out for the benefit of its free neighbor. On those tormented plains Iowa saw the worst elements of the slavocracy flaunting violence and injustice openly; and if the free-soilers also had their lawless champions, well, sometimes fire was needed to fight fire. Besides, Iowans found Bible-quoting and maniacally sincere John Brown much easier to take than the "Border Ruffians" who represented slavery.

When James W. Grimes campaigned for the governorship, he used Douglas' hated bill as his chief issue. But once elected, he found the legal latitude of his capacity to do anything about events rather limited, for his powers did not go beyond the borders of his own State. When

Kansas entered that phase of its history which would affix the principle, "Bleeding," before its name, the Iowa governor was hard put to help. Yet, James Grimes was not a man easily thwarted.

Once the governor determined to move into the turmoil over Kansas, his public actions at first glance appeared to be mostly bluster and bluff. He expended a great deal of verbiage, but actually seemed to accomplish little. What is important to realize, however, is that the free-soil struggle for mastery in Kansas Territory would largely be dominated by non-political elements. The contest would be won by recruiting large numbers of antislavery settlers and by equipping them with the tools needed to survive, especially guns. What they needed most from politicians like Grimes was official sanction for some of their more dubious enterprises, and, most of all, moral support to encourage the citizenry to back and facilitate the free-soil migration. It is an indication of Grimes' attitude that he willingly gave all the official help possible, and then quite likely gave an added unofficial and illegal boost to the cause somewhat later.

There was probably no need for Grimes to try to mold public opinion in his State nor to whip up a spirit of popular outrage. Free-soilers poured across Iowa in 1855 and 1856, and the State's proximity to Kansas made the hostilities there seem like local news. Nevertheless, the governor never played it safe, nor did he retreat into some Olympian aloofness over the question. He always spoke out in the most vitriolic manner possible.

As tale after tale of conflict and bloodshed rolled out of Kansas, Grimes decided to write Washington and demand action. On August 28, 1856 he sent President Franklin Pierce a highly inflammatory letter, and had a draft published in the local press. Complaining that former Iowans, for whom he claimed to feel a responsibility, were being denied justice and placed in danger by proslavery terrorism, he demanded that Federal troops be deployed in Kansas to protect free-soil settlers. He even went so far as to threaten that "in the event of non-compliance....a case will have arisen....when it will be the duty of the States 'to interpose to arrest the progress of the evils' in that Territory."¹

Nothing ever came of this bellicose demand, however. A presidential secretary wrote back partly soothing the governor, but also warning him that no State had the right to interfere in a territorial matter.² Nevertheless, the point is not so much that Grimes ultimately failed to lead the Iowa Militia into Kansas in some quixotic adventure, but that he willingly used his office as a free-soil forum. He practically announced that he was available to succor any phase of anti-slavery militancy.

Yet the executive was not the only branch of government in the State anxious to involve itself in the Kansas question. The legislature also had its fire-eaters, and they kept things stirred up in the

¹Salter, Grimes, op. cit., p. 26.

²Ibid.

General Assembly. Though Iowa's militancy failed to match that of New England, the legislative chambers still witnessed some very provocative goings-on.¹

On December 6, 1856, Representative D. C. Cloud of Muscatine, an inner-circle ally of Grimes and one of the State's new Republicans, submitted a joint resolution to the Iowa House on the Kansas situation. After strongly maintaining in the preamble that freedom was the nation's highest priority, the resolution proposed that (1) the General Assembly proclaim its unqualified opposition to the further extension of slavery by Federal acquiescence, and (2) that Iowa's "Senators be instructed and....Representatives be requested to exert their influence and vote for the admission of Kansas into the Union as a Free-State," and likewise to reject its admission if it offered any constitution "establishing or tolerating slavery."²

¹On December 9, 1856, Grimes received a letter from a Mr. F. B. Sanborn of the State Kansas Committee of Massachusetts. These State Committees were branches of a national organization set up to facilitate and finance free-soil activities in the contested area. Sanborn sought to establish whether Iowa planned to pass an appropriation to aid free-staters in Kansas as Vermont had done and as Massachusetts was on the verge of doing. Iowa actually had no intention of taking that strong a step. F. B. Sanborn of Boston, Massachusetts to James W. Grimes in Iowa City, Iowa, December 9, 1856, James W. Grimes Papers (Des Moines: State Historical Library) Vol. 1, n.n.

²Debates and Speeches in the Legislature of Iowa During the Session of 1856-7 (Iowa City: Iowa City Book and Job Office, 1857), p. 3.

Cloud then proceeded to back his resolution with some of the most forthright antislavery oratory heard in Iowa's Assembly for some time. He declared that:

Slavery is wrong in itself; it is morally wrong. And, in all cases the question of expediency should yield to right.... I belong to a party that opposes the further extension of slavery. We say, let it remain where it is, but let it extend no further.¹

Obviously moderation was not one of Cloud's strengths. He even went on to say he believed that "blacks have the rights of men in this country," and he applied the Declaration of Independence's "all men are created equal" to America's Black citizenry.²

On the surface it would seem that if the Republicans in the legislature wanted Cloud's resolution passed, it would come as a matter of course. The fledgling party had completely dominated the election of 1856 in Iowa and it held nearly a two-thirds majority that December--24 to 12 in the State Senate and 47 to 25 in the House. Yet the proposal did not meet with spectacular success, and the reasons for this failure are rather illuminating.

The House actually adopted the resolution after a three-day debate by a vote of only 38 to 26--hardly a ringing endorsement from a party which controlled the lower chamber 47 to 25.³

In the Senate the proposal never even came to a vote. It was tabled under a welter of amendments from its opponents. These results are rather perplexing since all the resolution proposed to accomplish

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 3.

was to issue an endorsement by Iowa of a simple free-soil position.

However, the results themselves are somewhat misleading. Much more can be learned by delving into the debates and examining the arguments used by the opposition. Such an examination reveals a rather confused situation. The whole matter revolved around the basic Democratic response to the implications of squatter sovereignty.

Kansas was inevitably a partisan issue in Iowa. Any piece of legislation touching upon the Kansas question was assured an almost predictable treatment. The Democrats found themselves so tied to the Douglas Act that they had to defend it. The Republicans, on the other hand, had risen as a result of popular outrage over its passage and were necessarily hostile to it. But it is important to remember that for most Democrats in Iowa only the act itself remained a partisan issue, not the elemental confrontation between slavery and antislavery. They defended Kansas-Nebraska and opposed Cloud's resolution, but solely on the basis of extolling the virtue of squatter sovereignty.

In essence the Democrats and their spokesman, Representative J. H. Sullivan, tried to impress upon the Assembly that the Kansas-Nebraska Act was entirely correct in repealing the Missouri Compromise since the earlier law had wrongly given Congress the power to decide on the extension of slavery.¹ Sullivan maintained that slavery existed as a purely local institution and beyond the jurisdiction of

¹Ibid., pp. 5-7.

the Federal government. The people alone should decide.

The Democrats vigorously argued that, while they believed in the right of a territorial population to decide the issue of slavery for itself, that position did not indicate proslavery attitudes on their part. In the debate on the Cloud resolution some of the most convincing antislavery oratory came from Democratic Representative, D. W. Scovill who voted with the opposition. He declared that he abhorred slavery as much as any Republican did and that he too hoped it would advance no further; but its acceptance or rejection by Kansas' settlers, Scovill maintained, was entirely their own affair.¹

Obviously this Democratic stand was reminiscent of Iowa's old constitutionalist-conciliatory philosophy. But it also gave party antislavery advocates like Scovill a common front with any proslavery brethren who happened to be in their midst. Doubtless many of the 26 "no" votes registered in the House against Cloud's resolution came from sincere antislavery Democrats who sought desperately to find a more restrained course. On the other side of the coin, the 38 "yes" votes out of 47 available Republicans indicate that several in that party preferred the relative anonymity of the abstension.

However, the Democrats' philosophic and legalistic moralizing did not suffice for Iowa's citizenry, as the party's continual defeats at the polls indicate. Kansas was not an ethical abstraction but an

¹Ibid., pp. 16-17.

all too visible battleground, and Iowans more and more came to cast their lot with the party which appealed to their inherent antislavery consciences. They had elected a governor in response to their outrage, and as time passed that governor obviously came to express the people's hostility. He also channelled these popular feelings into a new political structure for his State. But along the way James W. Grimes managed as well to become involved in one of the most unusual "crimes" in Iowa's history, the robbery of the State armory to supply Kansas free-soilers.

When the struggle to win Kansas turned violent, it quickly became obvious to free-staters in the North that they would have to send tough, battle-ready settlers into the Territory if they were to win it. Thus emerged the State Kansas Committees to organize, equip and arm any foot-loose antislavery advocates willing to emigrate. Grimes' political confidant, William Penn Clarke, headed the Iowa Kansas Committee. Though a responsible and respected State legislator, Clarke always seemed to be in the thick of every phase of antislavery militancy. As chairman of the Kansas Committee for his State he took on the ambitious project of recruiting and sending the free-soil expedition of James H. Lane across the Missouri River into the contested land.

Many prominent Iowans took part in the preparations for the venture during the spring and early summer of 1856. They willingly supplied Lane with food, clothing and all the tools he needed--except the

most crucial one, guns. He felt an acute need for firearms as he betrayed in a letter to Clarke from the immigrant train. In it he said, "I feel entirely confident that we will be intercepted not by U. S. soldiers, but by a Southern mob."¹ However, the church groups and other such responsible agencies which supplied Lane understandably balked at providing arms. Thus it was finally decided that the weapons would simply be stolen from the Iowa armory.

The robbery itself hardly exhibited the work of master criminals. The free-soil thieves merely took the key to the building, walked in and helped themselves. But the story becomes intriguing when one realizes that the key so casually picked up came from Governor Grimes' desk, and that after the theft there was still a surprisingly sufficient quantity of arms for the State's needs.

The existing evidence points to the rather startling conclusion that Governor Grimes actually consented to participate in the plot to rob his own arsenal. Exhibit A in the indictment of the governor is the key. The confessed organizer of the robbery, a Lane lieutenant named Richard J. Hinton, casually recounted his deed as an anecdote in an 1894 biography of John Brown. He merely noted that "at Iowa City, 1500 United States guns were taken from the state arsenal, the key of which was conveniently left accessible to my hands on Governor....Grimes' desk."²

¹James H. Lane from the Kansas border to William Penn Clarke at Iowa City, Iowa, July 3, 1856, Clarke Papers, *op. cit.*, no. 44.

²Richard J. Hinton, John Brown and His Men (London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1894), pp.55-56.

But more provocative than the "convenient accessibility" of the key is a cryptic letter Grimes sent to Clarke in early June, just prior to the theft. In it he said, "Your note by Mr. Morris came duly to hand. I made a requisition upon the government for between 1700 and 1800 muskets and 50 Colts' revolvers, and this two months ago."¹ In other words, Grimes had ordered an additional 1700-plus arms in April as Clarke began outfitting Lane's expedition, and in June 1500-plus arms were stolen for Lane's use because a key had been "conveniently" left on the Governor's desk. If Grimes was not directly implicated in the robbery, then coincidence was abusively stretched in the affair.

Yet however diverting it may be to speculate upon the possible peccadillos of Iowa's flamboyant antebellum governor, Grimes' documented achievements are more significant--even if not as dramatic.

Although elected as a Whig, Grimes had hardly entered the State House when he began working toward a political shift which redefined Iowa's party foundations. The presence of a sizable number of Southern-oriented and old-line conciliationist Whigs made leadership of that party an untenable position. Iowa had been polarized by Kansas-Nebraska into two camps--the antislavery men and what can only be described as "all others." For Grimes the only logical course was to give the new, already-existing realignment an organizational identity. He did so by heading the formation of the Republican Party in his State.

¹James W. Grimes in Iowa City, Iowa to William Penn Clarke in Iowa City, Iowa, June n. d., 1856, Clarke Papers, op. cit., no. 42.

Grimes' correspondence reveals that his decision was neither rash nor one he had been pressured into. Instead he had knowingly and willingly midwived the party's birth. Barely six months after he had taken the oath of office as Governor of Iowa, Grimes began writing to his old mentor, Salmon Chase, urging him to run for the Presidency and declaring, "It seems to me that it is time to thoroughly organize the Republican Party."¹ With old political ties obviously dissolving, the governor enthusiastically formed new ones.

This political preoccupation of the chief executive also worked upon his allies in the State. The newly-ascendent Whig-Free Soil coalition of politicians was no more comfortable with existing structures than its leader was. Men like William Penn Clarke, D. C. Cloud, J. W. Cattell, Benjamin Gue and others were of a militant brand of antislavery. The lines had been drawn in the 1854 election and their side had won. Now they sought a clean ideological break with the old order, and the new Republican Party offered a clear new set of political alternatives and a more meaningful expression of their attitudes. Almost spontaneously Free Soilers and antislavery Whigs metamorphized into Republicans. They sought out each other and expressed in common the sentiments typified by a letter Cattell sent to Clarke on January 8, 1856:

I think it is time the Republicans were getting a good working

¹Salter, Grimes, op. cit., p. 69.

organization in this State. There is no chance of the Americans [the short-lived American or Know-Nothing Party] taking any correct position on the slavery question.¹

On January 14, 1856 the inevitable became official. A call went out in the Muscatine Journal for interested citizens to meet and organize the Republican Party of Iowa. Although not signed, Rev. William Salter's unpublished notes attribute the authorship of this announcement to Governor Grimes.² The slavery question raised by the Kansas-Nebraska Act served as the proclamation's sole self-confessed justification:

Believing that a large majority of the citizens of Iowa are opposed to the political principles of the present administration and to the introduction of slavery into territory now free and that made free by the Compromise of 1820, and that the party styling itself the "Democratic Party" are striving to make slavery a great national institution....We would call upon all free citizens to meet in convention at Iowa City, on the 22nd day of February for the purpose of organizing a Republican Party to make common cause with a similar party already formed in several other States of the Union.

Many Citizens³

Because of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the polarization of ideological sentiment on slavery, Iowa experienced no chaos or confusion during that first year of Republican organization. The entire structure already existed. All it needed was the name and political paraphernalia to pull together existing elements. Before the party's

¹J. W. Cattell of Tipton, Iowa to William Penn Clarke of Iowa City, Iowa, January 8, 1856, Clarke Papers, op. cit., no. 11.

²Salter Papers, op. cit., n.n.

³Ibid.

first birthday it re-elected Grimes under its banner, captured both houses of the State legislature, and delivered Iowa's electoral votes to the Republican presidential standard-bearer, John Fremont.

The slavery question had created the Republican Party in Iowa, and it remained the central issue. On September 3, 1857, Grimes began working for appointment to the U. S. Senate by putting out a circular in the State calling for the election of Republican candidates, since the General Assembly would select the new senator.¹ Significantly, the language Grimes used to plead his party's case could hardly be considered temperate:

It cannot be disguised that the great issue between freedom and slavery is a prominent question in this contest. It has been made so by both political parties. They could not do otherwise. Freedom and slavery are the antagonistic elements in this government. They can not harmonize, and must overshadow every other question until settled upon the principle enunciated by the Republican party.²

Grimes succeeded. His party captured the Iowa assembly again in 1857 and he received his appointment to the Senate. Actually, Republicans won most elections they entered in those pre-Civil War years; and this in itself indicates the rising militancy in Iowa regarding slavery in general. Had the population been more moderate one would logically have expected the Democrats to have picked up some strength since the less strident Whigs would refuse to follow Grimes to

¹Iowa went to odd-year elections in 1857.

²Salter Papers, op. cit., n.n.

the new party.

The truth was, however, that the old party was in hopeless disrepair, and the new elements it picked up only served to divide and confuse it further. The correspondence of leading Democrats like Henry Clay Dean vividly points up this confusion. In an 1858 letter to Iowa's Democratic State Central Committee Chairman, Laurel Summers, Dean bemoaned his party's disunity, telling Summers that he had "but little hope or confidence of the Democrats of Iowa ever doing anything more than cut each others' throats."¹ Dean expressed similar sentiments to his old friend and Democratic State Representative, Dr. Gideon S. Bailey: "The Republicans are making calculations upon universal victory. Will they have it? What will the Democrats do? What do the Democrats say?"²

In the main, Dean's discouragement was well founded. Yet the Republican ascendancy was not unqualified. Though the young party held the legislature and the State House as well as winning the State's electoral votes in 1856 and 1860, the Democrats still mounted serious campaigns, especially in gubernatorial races. For instance, in the

¹Henry Clay Dean from an unspecified point during a tour of the Eastern U. S. to Laurel Summers of Des Moines, Iowa, dated only 1858, Dean Papers, op. cit., "Correspondence."

Henry Clay Dean no address to Gideon S. Baily in Des Moines, Iowa, June 12, 1858, Gideon S. Bailey Papers (Des Moines: State Historical Library) Vol. 1, no. 37.

Presidential election of 1856 Iowa went decisively Republican, giving Fremont 45,196 to Democrat Buchanan's 37,663 and Whig Filmore's 9,679; but in the contest for governor the following year Democrat Samuels was just shaded by Republican Lowe, 38,498 to 36,088.¹ The next round saw the same process repeated. In the gubernatorial race of 1859 Republican Kirkwood edged out his Democratic rival A. C. Dodge by a narrow 3200 vote margin--56,532 to 53,332; while in the national election of 1860 Republicans triumphed cleanly in Iowa--Lincoln 70,316, Douglas 55,041, Bell 1,763 and Breckenridge 1,035.²

A partial explanation for the Democrats' ability to run close gubernatorial races might be that Iowa Democrats often held basic anti-slavery attitudes, but were just not as militant as their Republican rivals. Thus they often could appeal to the more moderate elements in the State. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that despite the closeness of some contests, Republicans were completely in control.

Perhaps one of the most important questions which the modern student of the antislavery movement can ask at this juncture is, "what did the Republican majority do with its political power in terms of enacting its principles into law, or at least giving them some political expression?" The answer is, "Very little." Part of the reason for this is doubtless that on the State level not much could be done to express

¹William Duane Wilson, Description of Iowa and Its Resources (Des Moines: Mills and Company, 1865), p. 129.

²Ibid., pp. 129-133.

hostility to the alien institution of slavery. The only avenue of expression really open was in the area of civil rights legislation, and most Iowans still had an abiding sense of racial bigotry mixed in with their abhorrence of the Southern system. Therefore, it is to the Republicans' credit that they did take certain steps to grant Negro citizens some vestiges of citizenship in the face of this bigotry.

On December 22, 1856, the Republican-dominated legislature adopted a bill to repeal old section 2388 of the Iowa Code, thus rescinding the restriction on colored individuals giving testimony in court where Whites were involved.¹ This action had inherent egalitarian overtones and it struck directly at native racism. The Republicans had given their opponents an issue--a small one, it is true, but an issue nonetheless.

In those days before opinion polls it is impossible to gauge popular reaction to the Black testimony repeal; but the press of the State may serve as some barometer. As might have been expected the new law split the partisan editors right down party lines. Of all surviving papers no Democratic editor favored it and no Republican editor opposed it. In fact the press carried on a much more contentious debate than had the assembly. The bill gave the editors an excellent subject upon which to exercise their literary powers. Repub-

¹Acts, Resolutions, and Memorials Passed By the Sixth General Assembly of Iowa: 1856-1857 (Iowa City: P. Moriarty, State Printer, 1857), p.15.

licans expressed noble libertarian sentiments, Democrats intoned dire warnings of Black ascendancy, and both sides hurled magnificent sarcasm at each other.¹

Basically the Democratic editors appealed directly to native prejudice. One called Republicans "negrophilists" and accused them of willfully casting about for a way to commit more devilry.² Another maintained that, "Americanism [Know-Nothing Party] and Republicanism--in a State of fusion--give natural birth to this black and copper-colored monstrosity."³ But most typical was the Dubuque Express and Herald which gloomily predicted that:

The next proposition will be to allow Negroes, Indians and mulattoes to acquire citizenship with all the rights of whites, and the next to court white daughters and have white wives.⁴

¹One particularly choice bit of sarcasm came from Democratic editor A. P. Richardson of the McGregor North Iowa Times of January 2, 1857: "Who knows but Republican success in Iowa may not restore the races of mankind to that equality and fraternal brotherhood which existed on the day before Commodore Noah pronounced a curse upon his unreflecting, but simple-hearted son, Ham! Ham was 'in fun' when he ridiculed the nakedness of his father, and history tells us most emphatically that Noah was tight when he condemned his fractious boy. Noah, being caught in violation of the Maine Law [a prohibition enactment], one of the preserved fruits of Iowa Republicanism, it is eminently proper that our legislature should declare his acts null, by restoring the descendents of Ham to their ancient rights."

²Muscatine Iowa Democratic Enquirer, December 29, 1856.

³The Keosauqua Democratic Mirror, January 2, 1856.

⁴Dubuque Express and Herald, December 22, 1856.

On the Republican side, another Dubuque editor agreed that citizenship should indeed be the next step. Praising the legislature's action and holding that racial intermarriage was a personal thing and not the business of editorial philosophers, he boldly declared:

Let the Assembly, then, wipe this shameful and absurd restriction from our laws, and let the State of Iowa, born of Liberty, recognize in all its length and breadth, the truth that all men are created free and equal.¹

However, most Republican editors did not go that far, although one did condemn Democrats for manifesting "a vulgar prejudice against negroes [sic] which is not entertained even by the most enlightened slave states."² The main line of Republican argument ran that the act simply assured justice for all men under the law, and that even some slave-states allowed this much latitude to Blacks. One paper, in a vein of rich sarcasm, ridiculed Democratic forebodings of Negro ascendancy by noting that Iowa's entire Black population totalled a mere 271.³ A final thing to keep in mind is that many Republicans did not associate the act with racial equality. For example, the Montezuma Republican strongly supported the legislation in its January 10, 1857 issue, but on another page of that same issue it ran a series of virulent racial jokes.⁴

¹Dubuque Daily Republican, December 22, 1856.

²Des Moines Valley Whig [Keokuk], December 29, 1856.

³Quasqueton Guardian, January 3, 1857.

⁴Montezuma Republican, January 10, 1857.

Yet, strangely enough, a rebel streak of egalitarianism flourished in Iowa Republicanism. Considering that there once had been a debate on Black suffrage in the 1844 Constitutional Convention, it should hardly be surprising that this Republican liberality would surface in another such convention in 1857. The only difference was that this time it would take more than a negative vote in committee to kill it.

Iowa called the Constitutional Convention of 1857 for a variety of reasons--none of them related to slavery or civil rights. However, the demand for a reappraisal of the whole area of Black citizenship became increasingly unavoidable. The debate began when the convention reaffirmed the right of colored persons to give testimony against Whites.¹ With the question of Negro rights then opened, a proposal to allow Black suffrage quickly followed.

The vehicle for the following debate, a motion that the word "white" be stricken from the suffrage article of the old constitution, emerged from a splinter group of Republican delegates. Yet the ideological split in Iowa so clearly defined the nature of partisan politics that even the party's leaders felt they had to support the motion, or at least give it lip service. William Penn Clarke made an impressive speech from the floor during the ensuing three-day debate:

We are making a Constitution here, not alone for the government of the white people of Iowa, but to govern all in our community

¹Constitution of Iowa: 1857-1907 (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1907), pp. 22-23.

of all different complexions, climes, and nativities. We stand here, not to provide protection for the strong alone, but for all alike. Entertaining this view of our duties here, I would appeal to gentlemen to lay aside their prejudices.¹

Yet despite these liberal speeches there undoubtedly existed a feeling of apprehension among Clarke and his colleagues of the Republican leadership, for this motion of their idealistic brethren had played right into the hands of their Democratic opponents. Few questioned that most Iowans felt open hostility to the idea of full political citizenship for the Negro. To push this issue in the Convention courted disaster at the polls for the Republicans. On the other hand, they constantly preened themselves in public on their idealism and humanitarianism. There they stood, in control of the Convention--they had captured that election, too--and easily possessing the votes necessary to adopt the liberals' motion. But they were damned if they did and damned if they didn't. Passing it would alienate the voters and squashing it would alienate the liberal support they counted on and expose them to the charge of hypocrisy.

The trap was never sprung, however. Men like Clarke unquestionably had a sincere sense of idealism, but they were shrewd politicians as well. They extricated themselves from their dilemma by recourse to the most basic of all democratic processes--the referendum. With a vote of 23 to 10, the Republicans pushed through an amendment to have a separate ballot attached when the vote on ratification of the

¹W. Blair Lord (ed.), The Debates of the Constitutional Convention of Iowa: 1857 (Davenport: Luse, Lane and Company, 1857), Vol. I, p. 196.

Constitution went before the people.¹ The population of Iowa would be forced to decide whether to delete the word "white" from Article II, not the Republican delegates. To make the referendum even more palatable, the convention decreed that, in order to pass, the "yes" vote had to be a majority of the total vote cast on the ratification question.² Thus a failure to vote on the issue was tantamount to voting "no."

With the choice in the hands of the citizenry rather than in the hands of its most liberal elements, the vote became a foregone conclusion. The tally read, "yes" 8,489, "no" 49,387.³ While slavery was probably anathema to most Iowans in 1857, racism was still very much alive. Not until 1868 did the word "white" disappear from Article II of the Constitution.⁴

In its final form racism permeated much of the Constitution of 1857. The "whites only" suffrage clause was not the only limitation against Negroes. There were also restrictions of census counts, legislative apportionment, legislative eligibility and militia services to the White population alone.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 912.

²Ibid.

³Carl H. Erbe, "Constitutional Provisions for the suffrage in Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics (April, 1924), XXII, 206.

⁴Benjamin F. Shambaugh, The Constitutions of Iowa (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1934), p. 345.

⁵Constitution of 1857, op. cit., pp. 1-20.

So then, where did official Iowa stand on slavery and the Black in those years between the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Civil War? For one thing, it stood solidly against any expansion of slavery whatsoever. The institution might remain where it was, but Iowa's leadership would resist its every effort to break out of the sectional quarantine. As for the place of the Black in Iowa, the men who ran the State were probably more liberal than the White population they represented, but they trod very softly on the whole question. Basically they contented themselves with egalitarian oratory and harmless little legislative acts favorable to the Negro. Yet, compared to Iowa's pre-1854 history, the leadership of the State served an actively militant antislavery constituency.

CHAPTER V

IOWA'S CITIZENRY BECOMES MILITANT: 1855-1860

As the Kansas-Nebraska Act focused and directed antislavery hostility in the various strata of Iowa's officialdom, it was to be expected that the same force would be at work in the general population of the State. Interestingly enough, those Iowans who most determinedly expressed their hostility came largely from the most fundamentally respectable, middle class elements of the citizenry. Moreover, these "pillars of the community" not only willingly vocalized their discontent, they also involved themselves with the more illegal phases of the struggle, notably the Underground Railroad.

This militant middle class leadership of the antislavery movement increasingly fell under the influence of the one man who could dominate the scene much as James Grimes did. That man was John Brown. From the bloody plains of Kansas to the gallows in Virginia, Iowans defended him, protected him, and fought beside him. Though he never really lived in the State, John Brown is as much a part of Iowa's history as its oldest resident.

When Kansas-Nebraska made the expression of antislavery positions popular, or at least acceptable, the previously militant Congregational clergy were naturally in a position to assume the early moral leadership in the ensuing struggle.¹ The General Assembly might

¹See above, pp. 33-39 and 48.

debate free-soil Kansas resolutions and Governor Grimes might write ominous letters to Washington, but the practical work of winning Kansas meant helping send in free-soilers to win political control of the Territory. For this task the churches occupied an enviable position. Not only could they coordinate collections of supplies for free-soil immigrants passing through Iowa, but they tacitly sanctified the whole effort by their very involvement in it.

Although many churches took part in aiding free-soil migrations, the Congregationalists proved most willing. Several of their ministers played leading roles in the supplying of the antislavery pioneers, but two tend to emerge as the most active and certainly the most visible of their fellows, Rev. William Salter of Burlington and Rev. John Todd of Tabor. Standing at opposite ends of the northern route to Kansas, these two typified the rising militancy in Iowa's clergy.

The true Kansas migrations did not begin until 1856, and that became the year that Salter and Todd flung themselves most completely into the work. On July 12 Salter received a woeful letter from an early Kansas settler, Rev. George Lewis, recounting the many atrocities committed against men of his persuasion by the slaveholding element.¹ On August 2 the pastor got a similar letter from another free-

¹George Lewis of Lawrence, Kansas to William Salter of Burlington, Iowa, July 12, 1856, Salter Papers, op. cit., Vol. III. n.n.

soil acquaintance in Kansas, Edward Jones.¹ Such dispatches enabled men like Salter to rally their congregations and to reinforce the attitude that the slavocracy was generally evil and lawless.

On September 5, 1856, T. W. Higginson of the National Kansas Committee wrote for Salter's help. Higginson openly revealed that he was recruiting and arming between 50 and 100 Iowans to emigrate to the contested territory. He wished Salter's recommendation of ministers and laymen who might wish to join his expedition.² The point is that Salter certainly knew he was helping to equip a paramilitary force. On September 15, Salter received a warm letter of thanks from another member of the National Kansas Committee, T. B. Eldridge. The Committeeman also informed him that 100 free-soilers were encamped at Mount Pleasant, readying themselves for their departure; that another 200 were still expected; and that Todd was preparing another 150 in Tabor for the border crossing.³ The feeling pervades this correspondence that men like Salter and Todd considered themselves members of the inner councils of the militant Kansas Committee, and the organization treated them as such.

¹Edward Jones, [no address], Kansas to William Salter of Burlington, Iowa, August 2, 1856, Ibid., n.n.

²T. W. Higginson of Chicago, Illinois to William Salter of Burlington, Iowa, September 5, 1856, Ibid., n.n.

³T. B. Eldridge in Mount Pleasant, Iowa to William Salter of Burlington, Iowa, September 15, 1856, Ibid., n.n.

The commitment of the congregations to the activities of their pastors is somewhat harder to demonstrate. One could assume that such large migrations as suggested by Salter's correspondence could not have passed through Iowa as expeditiously as they did had not the people backed their ministers' programs of aid to the free-soilers. Beyond that there is the notation in Salter's papers that he once sent "28 shirts, 29 pairs of socks, 4 blankets, and 9 pairs of shoes," to a Kansas settlement.¹ These quantities certainly suggest a church drive, and thus congregational cooperation. At the other end of the State, Todd's autobiography vouches for the involvement of the Tabor people. The cleric noted that, "Our latchstrings were always out, and much of the time our houses, and granaries, and haymows were occupied. Provisions were plenty, and free, and without price."²

But no matter how cooperative the people or how grateful the beneficiaries of the efforts were, there remained a certain basic dilemma in the parsons' activities. The men they sent to Kansas were a hardy breed of pioneers who knew they would be fighting from the moment they crossed the border. It was not a prospect designed to draw pious, God fearing settlers. In many ways the free-soil crusaders truly matched the most degenerate element among their antagonists, the

¹National Kansas Committee circular to William Salter of Burlington, Iowa, November 28, 1856, Ibid., n.n.

²Todd, op. cit., p. 116.

infamous "Border Ruffians." As a result the Iowa clerics were being called upon to abet the progress of a group of shockingly Godless warriors. No honest minister could sustain such an experience without an almost traumatic degree of soul-searching. That they did suffer from this conscience provoking situation is obvious from a letter Todd sent to Salter on September 17, 1856:

It is greatly to be deplored that of the leading men in this matter so few are Christian men. They may be instrumental in securing to Kansas civil liberty, but other men and other influences must be employed before Kansas can be Christianized. They are by no means possessed of the spirit of the Pilgrim fathers. Surely we are fallen upon degenerate times, and I fear for our country, lest a just retribution is about to overwhelm us in an awful destruction.¹

Ironically, just about this time the reputation of John "Ossawatimie" Brown began to spread throughout Iowa. As the free-soilers' most battle-tested leader, and yet as an outspoken Bible-quoting Christian, Brown seemed much more acceptable to uneasy clerics than the men he typically led. In 1856 the old abolitionist made one of his early treks across Iowa, and he introduced himself to Todd.² Brown eventually crossed and recrossed the State several times, usually with fugitive slaves from Kansas in tow. In doing so he cemented, almost unconsciously, the main line of the Underground Railroad. Wherever he travelled in Iowa he found friends and allies, and the very

¹John Todd of Tabor, Iowa to William Salter of Burlington, Iowa, September 17, 1856, Salter Papers, op. cit., n.n.

²Todd, loc. cit.

fact that a known abolitionist warrior could move openly in the State goes far to indicate the level of militancy which was emerging.

The 1855-1860 period offered many other evidences of this growing militancy. One such example occurred in June of 1855 when the Fugitive Slave Law received its only test in Iowa. On June 24 pursuing Missourians captured a runaway slave in Burlington. He was apprehended while in the company of Dr. Edwin James, a known abolitionist and early conductor of the Underground Railroad. In a near repeat of the Ralph case, antislavery elements had the slave jailed to keep him from his abductors, and then appealed to halt extradition.¹

Burlington was the home of James Grimes, and the governor happened to be there when the slave was arrested. Grimes expressed both his concern and his militancy in a letter he subsequently wrote to his wife:

How it will end no one knows. I shall certainly furnish no aid to the man-stealers, and it has been determined that the negro [sic] shall have able counsel, and a resort to all legal means for release, before any other is resorted to. I am sorry that I am Governor of the State, for, although I can and shall prevent the State authorities from interfering in aid of the marshal, yet, if not in office, I am inclined to think I should be a law-breaker.²

In Iowa's two previous fugitive slave cases the legal machinery ground rather slowly. The Ralph decision took about a year to be adjudicated, and the Daggs case lasted nearly two years. It is probably

¹Salter, Grimes, op. cit., pp. 71-73.

²Ibid., pp. 72-73.

indicative of the change in Iowa's response to a confrontation with slavery that this latest case was disposed of in three days. The court released the Negro and sent him on his way to Canada amid the cheers of the people of Burlington.¹ On June 27 Grimes again wrote to his wife, and once more his letter revealed a good deal.

Thus has ended the first case under the fugitive slave law in Iowa. The State, the town and the people are saved from disgrace. How opinions change! Four years ago, Mr. Salter and myself, and not to exceed three others in town, were the only men who dared to express an opinion in opposition to the fugitive-slave law, and, because we did express such opinions, we were denounced like pick-pockets. Now I am Governor of the State; three-fourths of the reading and reflecting people of the county agree with me in my sentiments on the law, and a slave could not be returned from Des Moines County into slavery.²

If Grimes' remarks to his wife correctly assessed the attitudes of the people of Des Moines County, it might be rewarding to test Herriott's thesis by comparing a section-of-nativity break-down for the county to that of Iowa as a whole. This seems particularly important if one considers that opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law suggests a more generalized opposition to slavery itself, and therefore a branch of militancy bordering on abolitionism.

The release of the runaway slave occurred in the summer of 1855, so a comparison of figures in the 1856 State census would appear to be fairly representative.³

¹Ibid., p. 73.

²Ibid.

³The Census Returns of the Different Counties of the State of Iowa for 1856 (Iowa City: Crum and Boye, 1857), p. 118.

TABLE I

NATIVITY OF NATIVE BORN RESIDENTS OF DES MOINES COUNTY
IN 1856 AS COMPARED TO THE NATIVITY
OF IOWA'S GENERAL POPULATION

Area of nativity	Population D. M. County	Percent of D.M. pop	Percent in Iowa
New England	666	4.3	4.3
Middle States	2,647	17.2	20.1
Southern States	1,437	9.3	13.0
Northwest States	5,156	33.4	40.6
Iowa	5,513	35.8	22.0
Total	15,419	100.0	100.0

In this foregoing break-down the only sharp disparity between the percentages for Des Moines County and those for Iowa as a whole occurs in the areas of (1) a smaller representation from the Old Northwest, and (2) a much larger proportion of native Iowans in the county. Yet these areas of disparity do not necessarily indicate that the attitudes of the people in Des Moines County on the question of slavery would be significantly different from those of the State in general. The percentages for the key areas of New England, the Middle States and the South are all within 4%. Thus these probable sources of militant positions were logically of neither stronger nor weaker influence in Des Moines County than in Iowa as a whole.

On this question of shifts in attitude toward slavery there is one last item in Governor Grimes' correspondence which deserves attention. On December 14, 1856, he wrote his wife from Iowa City concerning a meeting he had attended at the capital conducted by noted abolitionist Wendell Phillips. The Governor informed her that Phillips:

Gave us the length and breadth of Garrisonism, and, what was unexpected to me, the audience not only listened patiently to what he said, but received his utterances with unbounded applause.¹

Such an occurrence would probably have been impossible a few years earlier. Iowa was clearly becoming more openly militant.

This open militancy, however, had its greatest expression in the operation of that fascinating institution, the Underground Rail-

¹Salter, Grimes, op. cit., p. 92.

road. The URR is an elusive subject to pursue because the whole thing was administered in great secrecy. No records were kept during the first years of its operation, probably because of its obvious illegality.¹ To make the problem even more difficult, it appears quite likely that every conductor along the route knew only two of his colleagues--the one from whom he received his Black passengers and the one to whom he sent them. Yet enough is known of the functioning of the system to make several generalizations.

First of all, the URR operated basically as a west-to-east line. The goal of fleeing slaves was not north to Minnesota and Canada, but east toward Chicago and then to Canada. Iowa's passengers came mainly from Kansas and Missouri. If it were the former, then the slaves travelled the entire line. If, on the other hand, they had fled from Missouri, they would come north until they hit the station closest to them, and then the conductors would route them toward Chicago. There is no way of determining how slaves learned where in Iowa they would find that first friendly station, but the system was apparently used

¹The only way to reconstruct the main route of the URR is to go over county histories, personal papers and post-Civil War autobiographies. Even then the picture is far from complete. In Iowa's archives the only existing records are a June 14, 1860 message from J. B. Grinnell to William Penn Clarke informing him that he was being sent "5 chattels," and two 1861 notes to William Salter that "contrabands" were on their way to his home. J. B. Grinnell of Grinnell, Iowa to William Penn Clarke of Iowa City, Iowa, June 14, 1860, Clarke Papers, op. cit., no. 155 and W. H. Hicks of Denmark, Iowa to William Salter of Burlington, Iowa, July 18, 1861, and P. B. Bell, [no address] to William Salter of Burlington, Iowa, October 28, 1861, Salter Papers, op. cit., n.n.

enough to suggest that some sort of "Underground Advertising Agency" existed to publicize the route.

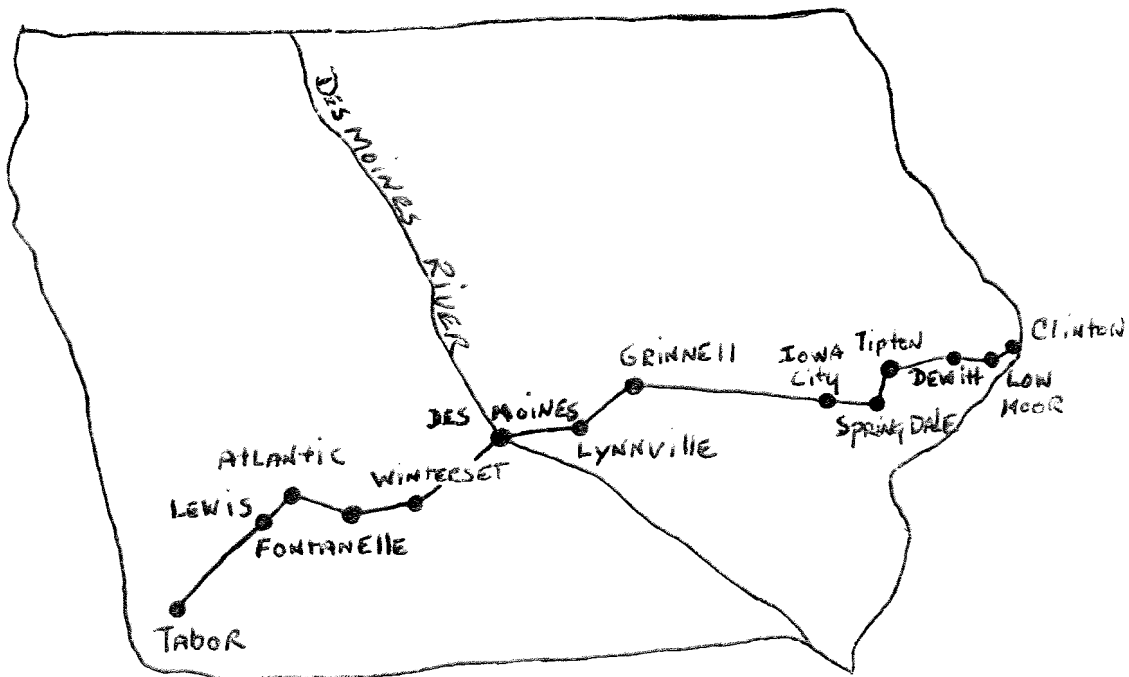
A second consideration is that some of the most respectable elements in the State--doctors, lawyers, legislators, ministers, merchants and farmers--served as conductors or station-masters. This often proved advantageous since the system usually demanded elaborate paraphernalia, such as hidden rooms, false-bottomed wagons, and similar devices.

It might appear that the well-to-do were simply in a better position to advertise their activities in the post-Civil War histories when it had become fashionable to admit complicity in the program. But actually, involvement of the upper and upper-middle classes in the URR should not be particularly surprising when one recalls that the Congregational leadership had almost urged its people to embark upon such a project as early as the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850.¹ With such a moral endorsement respectable elements would logically involve themselves if they had any desire to battle slavery directly. Nor was the Congregational Church the only denomination willing to have its members engage in such questionable enterprises. In 1858 the earliest surviving minutes of an Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church recorded the report of a committee on slavery which maintained:

¹See above, p. 48.

It is well known that the Methodist Episcopal Church has always declared itself as bitterly opposed to the system of slavery, as contrary to natural law, the law of God, and all just human laws, and that it ought to be, as soon as possible, destroyed by the civil power sustaining it. And that the Church should also put forth all proper moral influences in opposition to it, in view of its total extirpation, the legislation of the State to the contrary notwithstanding.¹

So then, what was this famous, if clandestine, route, and who were the men who ran it? First, it must be admitted that there are probably many stations lost to memory, especially those sub-stations used by Missouri slaves fleeing north to reach the main line. However, the basic west-east route is fairly well known and has been reproduced on the map below.



¹Minutes of the Fifteenth Session of the Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1858 (Burlington: C. Dunham, 1858), p. 15.

Tabor served as the westernmost outpost. As previously noted, that station, like many others, opened in 1854--the year of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.¹ Tabor's conductors were Deacon S. H. Adams, Deacon George B. Gaston, and their pastor, Rev. John Todd. Gaston was something more than merely a deacon in the local church, however. He had also founded the town, and he remained its leading citizen until his death.²

Leaving Tabor passengers on the road travelled into Cass County. There they generally stopped at the home of Rev. George B. Hitchcock, a Massachusetts-born Congregational minister at Lewis.³ This cleric, like Todd, was something of a fire-brand, and he reportedly had lost his son in the Kansas struggle.⁴ Another station a few miles away was the Grove City House Hotel in Atlantic, run by D. A. Barnett.⁵ This hotel generally housed John Brown during his flights from Kansas, although he also had occasion to use the Lewis accommodation.

After leaving either of the two Cass County stations the route

¹See above, pp. 61-62.

²Todd, op. cit., p. 161.

³Compendium of History and Biography of Cass County, Iowa (Chicago: Henry Taylor and Company, 1906), p. 109.

⁴Todd to Salter, Salter Papers, loc. cit.

⁵History of Cass County, Iowa (Springfield, Illinois: Continental Historical Company, 1884), p. 281.

moved to the outskirts of Fontanelle. There the passengers stayed with another ex-Massachusetts pioneer, Azariah Root.¹ This conductor, a prosperous farmer of the area, eventually served Adair County as a judge.² Root's charges then made their nocturnal passage to the Winterset area and probably to the farm homes of either James Farris, William McDonald, or John Early.³ Little is known of any of these men, but Farris purportedly had the unique distinction of aiding the flight of a slave belonging to his Missouri son-in-law.⁴

From Winterset the line moved on to Des Moines. Here the fugitive slaves would be taken in charge by one of three men, all of whom were among the most prominent in the city--James C. Jordan, Isaac Brandt, and John Teesdale.⁵ Jordan was a rising local politician, Brandt a successful merchant, and Teesdale the official State Printer. There was also one other conductor in the Des Moines area, the Baptist minister, Rev. Demas Robinson, who operated just outside town.⁶

Once across the Des Moines River and out of town, the route

¹Lucian M. Kilburn (ed.), History of Adair County, Iowa (Chicago: The Pioneer Publishing Company, 1915), I, 206.

²History of Adair and Guthrie Counties, Iowa (Springfield: Continental Historical Company, 1884), p. 807.

³Herman A. Mueller (ed.), History of Madison County and Its People (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), I, 183-184.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Brigham, op. cit., I, 167.

⁶L. F. Andrews, History of Polk County (Des Moines: Baker-Trisler, 1908), I, 184.

wended eastward to Lynnville in Jasper County. Here were the stations run by Matthew Sparks and Joseph Arnold.¹ Nothing much is known of Sparks, but Arnold was something of a local institution. A restless Quaker, given the title of "Preacher" by his neighbors, he eventually became a practicing attorney.²

From Lynnville the Underground Railroad "track" led to the home of J. B. Grinnell in the town bearing his name.³ Grinnell was more than the preeminent citizen of a small Iowa community, he was also one of the State's most influential men. Born in Vermont in 1821, and educated in New York, Grinnell claimed that the noted abolitionists of the 1830's and 1840's--Theodore Weld, Joseph Birney, and Gerrit Smith--became his early heroes.⁴ Coming to Iowa in 1853, he began his URR affiliation almost immediately. Like many of his fellow conductors, Grinnell personally knew John Brown and aided him in one of his more notorious exploits. In his book he recalled an 1858 conversation he had with Brown during which the latter, speaking in the strange argot of their adopted profession, noted, "I was in the 'wool business,' and am still....I hear you are openly."⁵ "Wool" was a sort

¹James B. Weaver, Past and Present of Jasper County, Iowa (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen, 1912), I, 373.

²Ibid., p. 664.

³Josiah Bushnell Grinnell, Men and Events of Forty Years: 1850 to 1890 (Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1891), p. 217.

⁴Ibid., p. 27.

⁵Ibid., p. 210.

of code-word for Negro.

Grinnell's passengers, after leaving his station, moved on to Iowa City where William Penn Clarke received them.¹ This legislator remained one of the most sincere advocates of the antislavery cause. Though a member of the highest political councils of the State, Clarke willingly participated in less socially accepted endeavors--like the Underground Railroad--for moral reasons.

Once out of Iowa City URR conductors had two options: (1) they could swing down to the Quaker settlement of Springdale, or (2) they could take their charges up to Tipton. From this point on names and documented incidents become very scarce. In neither Springdale nor Tipton were any individual names recorded though the towns were known slave drops.² It is also known that John Brown made frequent visits to the Springdale Quakers in his adventures.

Once out of Springdale and Tipton the next major station was at Clinton.³ After this last stop in Iowa the slaves crossed the Mississippi and headed for Chicago. At Clinton, however, great care had to be exercised for it was the logical place for slave-catchers to lie in wait. Complicating the situation further, Clinton was also the home

¹Clarke Papers, loc. cit.

²History of Cedar County (Chicago: Historical Publishing Company, 1901), II, 9.

³P. B. Wolfe (ed.), History of Clinton County, Iowa (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen, 1911), I, 393.

office of the U. S. Marshal.¹ For this reason sub-stations operated in DeWitt and Low Moor, small towns a few miles away.² In Clinton itself the station-master was C. B. Campbell, of whom little is known beyond the affirmation that he had a large house and the resources to pay a "stiff price" for a skiff across the river.³

There was a certain inevitability in John Brown's work linking the major stations of the Underground Railroad into a cohesive whole. So much of the old abolitionist's labor consisted of relieving slave-owners of their human property, and then transporting the escapees across Iowa to freedom. Brown, in fact, was probably one of the few men who knew the entire route of the URR in Iowa.

In 1859, Brown's hectic last year, the old free-soil warrior made his final trip into the State. A year-and-a-half before he had begun training a small group of followers for the famous raid on Harper's Ferry, and in 1859 he returned to western Iowa to pick up needed weapons. The guns, two hundred Sharps' rifles, had been stored in the cellar of Rev. Todd at Tabor. As far as the cleric knew at the time they were supposedly slated for use in Kansas.⁴

By the time of this final visit, however, Brown's obsession about slavery had become all-consuming, and the proximity of Missouri slave-owners offered too great an opportunity to pass up. In February

¹Ibid., p. 394.

³Ibid., pp. 393-394.

²Ibid., p. 393.

⁴Todd, op. cit., p. 157.

he and his cohorts plunged south in an unexpected drive and liberated twelve Blacks from their master. The Missourian, unfortunately, resisted the attack and was killed.¹

At this point Brown had a disconcerting awakening. In the past year the Kansas situation had stabilized somewhat and Iowans no longer expected violent conflict on their borders. The killing of the Missourian therefore provoked and aroused the countryside, and Brown no longer felt welcome in the area. Though George Gaston still housed his old associate, the rest of Tabor repudiated the entire action. They adopted a resolution which affirmed that "they could not approve of an armed invasion of a neighboring state with which [they] were ostensibly at peace."² Consequently, Brown hastily left Tabor and moved rapidly eastward along the route of the Underground Railroad.

His party made a brief recorded stop at the home of Rev. Hitchcock at Lewis.³ From there the caravan probably followed the line through Fontanelle and Winterset, though no record remains of their passage. The next stop they are known to have made was at the station run by James C. Jordan at Des Moines. The Virginia expatriate hurriedly sought out fellow-conductor, John Teesdale, and the latter paid the ferriage across the Des Moines River for Brown's men and the Blacks they

¹Ibid., p. 158.

²Ibid., pp. 160-161.

³Fred B. DeWitt, "The History of Griswold, Iowa," MSS Des Moines, State Historical Library, p. 13.

were freeing.¹

There may have been a stop at Lynnville during that bitter February hegira, but again there is no record of one. There definitely was a stop at Grinnell, however, and Brown's little band received a warm welcome from both the town and its founder.² While there, the Kansas warrior was asked to speak at an open town meeting. The whole situation had an aura of unreality, for by this time Brown's Missouri adventure had put a \$3000 price on his head and a federal warrant had been issued for his arrest; yet there he was, speaking openly at a town meeting and lodging with the town's leading citizen.³ Strangely, the speech Brown gave was, for him at least, rather defensive and pacific. Grinnell quoted him as saying that the lives he had taken were in "self-defense," and he maintained that he had "never counseled violence, nor would he stir to insurrection which would involve the innocent and helpless."⁴ Ironically, only eight months later Brown engaged in the insurrection at Harper's Ferry.

Meanwhile, word went out that federal authorities and certain

¹Gordon Smith, John Brown in Cedar County (Tipton, Iowa: Cedar County Historical Society, [n.d.], p. 9.

²Grinnell, op. cit., pp. 210-211.

³Erik McKinley Eriksson, "William Penn Clarke," Iowa Journal of History and Politics (January, 1927), XXV, 43.

⁴Grinnell, op. cit., p. 212.

private elements in Iowa planned to capture the old abolitionist and his twelve Black fugitives. The leader of the endeavor was Samuel Workman, postmaster at Iowa City.¹ Grinnell went immediately to work trying to line up a box-car which Brown's party could use in its flight to Canada, but for some inexplicable reason he failed to obtain one.² At this point Grinnell's adjacent station-master on the URR, William Penn Clarke, stepped in and secured the needed rolling stock.³

With little difficulty and no great concern about concealment, Brown and his coterie boarded the car in Iowa City and left the State for the last time. Workman's plans to capture him had hopelessly miscarried. Part of the reason no doubt stemmed from the fact that Brown and his men were well armed, and the old warrior was widely known as a fierce fighter; yet the group was small and the implication persists that Workman's failure might also have risen from a general lack of support in Iowa at large.

The whole affair of the February-March flight across the State is curiously ambiguous. Brown suffered repudiation at Tabor, which suggests that many Iowans probably were shocked by the invasion of Missouri. This supposition finds support in the temperate and apologetic speech at Grinnell. But, on the other hand, some of the best doors in Iowa remained open to him during his passage to Canada, and

¹Eriksson, loc. cit.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

the boldness of his movements indicates a more tolerant attitude within Iowa as a whole. Even the argument that Iowans were more concerned about the fate of the fugitive Blacks than with their liberator seems insufficient to explain the State's actions.

In any event, the Missouri invasion was not the last time John Brown would test the tolerance of Iowa or the depth of its anti-slavery convictions, for the free-state was to play a major role in the old man's greatest exploit, the ill-fated raid on Harper's Ferry.

It is one of the great ironies of Iowa history that Quakers and Quaker villages are so closely involved with the more violent phases of the State's confrontation with slavery. Just as Salem served as the setting for the Daggs affair, so Springdale linked itself irreversibly with John Brown's Raid. The Captain trained his small force near the little town, and three of its young men joined him on his hopeless expedition.

Brown and the Springdale Quakers first became acquainted in 1856 when the abolitionist passed through the area fresh from his Kansas activities.¹ In December of 1857 he returned with ten men. The group stayed with the pious household of a rather credulous Quaker farmer named William Maxon to whom they gave the use of their horses and wagons in return for board and room.² Basically Brown received a warm welcome from the local citizenry, especially the younger segment, but

¹Louis Jones, op. cit., p. 192.

²Ibid.

he remained silent as to his purposes.¹

However, the presence of such a celebrity focused attention on the Maxon farm, and the party's activities there were curious enough to arouse interest. Before long even the pacifistic Quakers realized that some sort of military training was being conducted on their neighbor's lawn. That they were serious maneuvers is attested to by the fact that the drill-master was a former regular army officer named A. D. Stephens.²

When questioned as to the purpose of the training, Brown vaguely announced his intention to strike directly at slavery in the South, and immediately met with expressions of opposition and pessimism from the older element in town.³ However, four young men not only endorsed his plan, but actively joined it. They were Edwin and Barclay Coppoc, Steward Taylor and George Gill.⁴ Gill even rose to a position of confidence in the inner circle of Brown's band, being selected Secretary of the Treasury of the envisioned Free Government of Virginia.⁵ Paradoxically, Gill was the only one of the four not to be with his commander at the end.

¹Smith, op. cit., p. 6.

²Stephens had been court-martialled for assaulting a certain Major James Longstreet, later to be Robert E. Lee's second-in-command. Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 7.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 8.

When the small army left Springdale in early 1858, Gill and Taylor went with it while the Coppocs remained behind. But in early July of 1859 a letter arrived at the Coppoc farm and the two young brothers hastily left for the East. The Quakers gave the matter little thought, for Brown's dreams all seemed a bit unlikely. The shock, therefore, was all the greater when the attack on Harper's Ferry broke into the news. Yet the most stunning surprise came from the announcement that Steward Taylor had been killed in the October 19 battle, that Edwin Coppoc had been taken along with the Captain, and that Barclay Coppoc, one of the few survivors, was fleeing across the country with federal authorities in pursuit.¹ Barclay owed his escape to the fact that he and John Brown's son, Owen, had been stationed at the rear to cover the planned retreat.² When encircling State and federal forces eradicated all hope of withdrawal, the two slipped into the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Back in Springdale the dismay of the supposedly pacifistic Quaker elders at the lawless behavior of their offspring was voiced in a public repudiation of the raid. On December 7, the town openly declared that it had had no knowledge of the action against Virginia--

¹Thomas Teakle, "The Rendition of Barclay Coppoc," Iowa Journal of History and Politics (October, 1912), X, 515-518.

²Smith, op. cit., p. 14.

probably true in the strictest sense---and that it heartily disavowed it.¹

In addition to Sringdale, the press around the State had its views. The raid afforded the Democrats a rare political opportunity since it represented a chance to link the Republicans with Brown's action. All extant Democratic papers without reservation condemned the act and all its participants. One editor noted that "those who have any sympathy whatever with this rebellion should be made to feel by painful experience what it is to incur the displeasure of an outraged people and a violated law."² The most concerted attacks, of course, were aimed directly at Republicans. One paper alleged a tie-in between the raiders and the North's "leading freedom shriekers."³ The most virulent brickbat came in an editorial by J. M. Casey of The Iowa Democrat⁴ In his condemnation Casey declared that Brown's papers implicated "leading Republicans in the East," and that William Seward had personal forehand knowledge of the insurrection.⁵

¹Louis Jones, op. cit., p. 196.

²The Sioux City Register, October 29, 1859.

³[Muscatine] Iowa Democratic Enquirer, October 27, 1859.

⁴The [Sigourney] Iowa Democrat, November 4, 1859.

⁵Ibid. In the same issue Casey ran a news story concerning the elopement of a white girl with a Black. The item ran under the headline, "Practical Republicanism," and it assured its readers that Republicans felt "a nigger is better than a white man."

This vituperation, however, was not particularly troublesome to Republican editors in Iowa. The majority of them defended their principles while circumventing the militant implications of Brown's raid. Most of these Republicans condemned the action itself, but in doing so they elevated the old abolitionist to the level of a tragic hero, a kind of King Lear, driven mad by the murder of his son in Kansas and acting out some impulse to wreak desperate revenge upon the slave system. Typical of this Republican response was O. C. Bates' editorial in The DeWitt Standard:

Brown had received injuries at the hands of slaveholders which had destroyed his domestic peace, robbed him of a home, and the grief incident to the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of the border ruffian slavocrats, rendered him a monomaniac on the question of slavery.... Had not Stephen A. Douglas repealed the Missouri Compromise, Old Brown today would be contented in the enjoyment of a peaceful home, and in the full possession of his reasoning faculties.... Ossawatimie Brown is not morally guilty of the crimes committed in the outbreak at Harper's Ferry.¹

Almost all Republican editors branded Brown a "monomaniac" on slavery, but they also maintained that the system's inherent evils had driven the old man mad. The editors refused to yield a step in their basic hostility to the institution.

The repercussions of the Harper's Ferry Raid did not end with the reaction of the press, however. The insurrection itself was like a huge stone dropped into a quiet pool. The ripples it created rocked the State again and again. The first "wave" to shake Iowa, after the

¹The DeWitt Standard, October 28, 1859.

initial impact had died down was the disclosure that Brown's papers contained some slightly suspect letters from J. B. Grinnell.¹ In the violent Southern reaction which followed the October uprising, Virginia's Senator J. M. Mason had called for a full Congressional investigation of the alleged "conspiracy." Grinnell quickly went to Washington to answer charges. However, Iowa's new senator, James W. Grimes, applied sufficient pressure to get Mason to drop the investigation of his fellow Iowan.²

A second aspect of the State's contribution to Brown's adventure could not be so easily dismissed. Steward Taylor's death, Edwin Coppoc's capture at John Brown's side, and Barclay Coppoc's fugitive status were all a painful reality which could not be ignored. In the matter of Edwin's fate, Iowa's only option was to stand back and witness the inevitable. On November 1, 1859, a bare two weeks after his capture, Edwin Coppoc faced trial in a Virginia court while handcuffed to the wounded Brown.³ Six weeks later, on December 16, the obvious verdict of the Southern jury was carried out, and the young Springdale Quaker dropped through the trap of a Virginia gallows.⁴

However, the fate of Edwin's younger brother, Barclay, had yet to be decided. The youthful fugitive fled desperately for Iowa. Trusting almost no one and living off the land, young Coppoc somehow made the

¹Grinnell, op. cit., p. 218.

²Ibid., pp. 218-219.

³Teakle, op. cit., p. 515.

⁴Ibid.

arduous trek across an aroused country and arrived at Springdale on December 17, the day after his brother's execution.¹ Though exhausted, emaciated and near collapse, Barclay's ordeal was not yet over. The embittered Virginians wanted him back. However, despite the repudiation of the village elders, his younger friends were inspired by the Brown expedition, and they put Barclay under a protective guard.²

Coppoc was obviously fortunate in the loyalty of his friends, but his greatest piece of luck undoubtedly came when Iowa elected Samuel J. Kirkwood to be the new Governor of the State. It was with this poised and crafty Republican that Virginia would have to deal if it hoped to bring the second Coppoc to justice; and the Governor's Inaugural Address of January 9, 1860 did not afford the outraged slave-state much hope. Kirkwood stoutly refused to repudiate Brown's action unconditionally:

While the great mass of our northern people utterly condemn the act of John Brown, they feel and express admiration and sympathy for the disinterestedness of purpose by which they believe he was governed, and for the unflinching courage and calm cheerfulness with which he met the consequences of his failure.³

On the other hand, Kirkwood also held open the door of conciliation, and expressed no greater hostility to the slave system than his

¹Ibid., p. 522.

²B. F. Gue, "John Brown and His Iowa Friends," The Midland Monthly (March, 1897), VII, 273.

³The Inaugural Address of Samuel J. Kirkwood, January 9, 1860 (Des Moines: John Teesdale, State Printer, 1860), p. 11.

predecessor, James Grimes, had in 1854:

Passions will subside, reason will resume its sway, and then our southern brethren will discover that they have been deceived and misled, as to our feelings and purposes; that the people of the north, while hoping and praying for the day when no slave shall press our soil, yet do neither claim nor desire any power to interfere with slavery in any of the States where it exists.¹

However, Kirkwood's declaration of Northern good will ultimately proved to be somewhat lacking when it came time to deliver a fellow Iowan to a Southern hangman. On January 23, 1860, the newly-elected Governor Letcher of Virginia sent an agent named Camp to Kirkwood with a formal requisition for the return of Barclay Coppoc.² Iowa's chief executive read the order carefully and then stunned Camp with a refusal to honor it. As he later reported to the Iowa House, five technicalities prevented him from ordering the young Quaker's arrest; but an examination of those technicalities shows them to be flimsy almost to the point of absurdity. For instance, Kirkwood maintained that, while the preamble of the order affirmed that Coppoc had abetted John Brown in treason against Virginia, the body of the requisition did not specifically mention just what State the Iowan was a fugitive from.³ The other four "defects" were equally incomprehensible.

¹Ibid., p. 15.

²Teakle, loc. cit.

³Special Message of Governor Samuel Kirkwood in Reply to a Resolution of Inquiry Passed By the House of Representatives, March 2, 1860 (Des Moines: John Teesdale, State Printer, 1860), p. 5.

Kirkwood did tell Mr. Camp, however, that if a properly written order reached his desk he would honor it.¹ The implication seems quite clear that the Governor was stalling for time. Such pettifoggery had not prevented Pennsylvania's Governor Packer from returning two Harper's Ferry fugitives from his State pursuant to a requisition identical to the one Kirkwood rejected.² In those days of less-than-instantaneous communication a corrected order would take time to arrive, and time could--and ultimately would--work in Barclay Coppoc's favor.

It would be interesting to speculate upon what Kirkwood might have done as an individual to warn the young felon of the danger which hung over him had not the lid of secrecy Agent Camp sought to maintain been accidentally blown off. One hint of the Governor's attitude may have been revealed when, after the affair had become known to certain interested parties, Kirkwood went out of his way to publicize the entire thing, including the release of Letcher's original order to the press.³

Fortunately, the Governor could stay within the letter of the law. On January 23, at the very moment Kirkwood was refusing Letcher's

¹Ibid., p. 12.

²Isaac Brandt (ed.), History of John Brown's Raid (Des Moines: Watters-Talbott, 1895), p. 23.

³Special Message, op. cit., p. 10.

requisition, the responsibility of saving Barclay Coppoc passed to two known antislavery State legislators, B. F. Gue and Ed Wright, who had propitiously come to see the Governor. Gue later recounted the story of Coppoc's rescue, and it reads today like a romantic novel.

Gue and Wright arrived at Kirkwood's office that evening on official business. Entering unannounced, they found the Governor "in conference with a pompous looking man....who was swinging his arms wildly in his wrath."¹ Kirkwood made some quiet remark about supposing that the stranger "did not want his business made public," to which the stranger replied, "I don't care a damn who knows it now, since you have refused to honor the requisition."²

The two intruders soon realized that they had stumbled into a session concerning the extradition of their notorious young raider. The Virginia agent openly argued that the fugitive might escape before Letcher could repair the "defects" in the requisition, upon which the Governor began describing the various possibilities under the Iowa Code by which Coppoc could be held while the repairs were being made. However, before Kirkwood read those laws which might detain Camp's quarry, he shot the two legislators a "significant" look.³ The intruders quietly withdrew, then hurriedly went into action.

¹Gue, op. cit., pp. 273-274.

²Ibid., p. 274.

³Ibid.

Gue and Wright first sought out fellow Republican legislators, Grinnell, J. W. Cattell, David Hunt, Amos Hoag, and a few others Gue left unnamed in his account. This ad hoc committee appointed Isaac Brandt, a known friend of John Brown, to find a courier to ride for Springdale. A wiry ex-cowboy named Williams was selected and given credentials identifying him to station-masters of the Underground Railroad, thus assuring him a supply of fresh horses along the way. The long ride was quickly made and Springdale's self-appointed militia--seventy-five strong--formed about their hero. As soon as he could be prepared for travel they put Barclay aboard a train for Canada.¹

On February 10, 1860 an elaborate formal requisition arrived at Kirkwood's desk, and he signed an order for Barclay's arrest; but by this time the youthful veteran of Harper's Ferry was far beyond the jurisdiction of either state.²

The young Iowan's adventures in the antislavery movement were not over, however, for by the summer of 1860, with his extradition something of a dead letter, Barclay popped up in Kansas aiding the escape of Missouri slaves.³ When the Civil War broke out, Coppoc, still in his early twenties, received a commission as a lieutenant in the Fourth Kansas Volunteers. Unfortunately, his war record proved

¹Ibid., pp. 274-275.

²Ibid., p. 276.

³Ibid.

lamentably short, for in August of 1861 he died at the hands of Missouri guerrillas when the troop train he was riding plunged off a sabotaged bridge into the Platte River.¹

With Barclay Coppoc passed Iowa's last living link to the final phase of its peace-time involvement in the antislavery movement. Harper's Ferry was soon to be followed by the inevitable climax of the crusade John Brown had championed and Iowans, to one degree or another, had endorsed. The Civil War brought Brown's battle to the entire nation.

¹Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

ANTISLAVERY IN IOWA: A SHARPENED VIEW

The events following Harper's Ferry were probably the final proof that Iowa's basic hostility to slavery had grown too militant for compromise, and that the conflict between the two life-styles was in fact "irrepressible." While some political figures in those eleventh-hour years--men such as Kirkwood, for example--might still mouth assurances that free-states like Iowa would not interfere with slavery where it already existed, such oratory seemed rather flat when a local abolitionist could marshal on his behalf every element in the State from the chief executive to a retired cowboy.

By 1854 Iowa had turned the corner. From that time on it was locked in earnest combat with slavery. It might claim only to be battling against the system's expansion, but in point of fact no part of the institution received any real succor from the free-state. Even the highly legal demand of the South that Iowa return its fugitive slaves met with implacable resistance. Then the Kansas struggle added militaristic stridency to the battle Iowa had decided to accept. When the Civil War erupted it merely nationalized a confrontation which Iowa had faced up to six years before.

Of course unanimity had never existed in the State. Even after Ft. Sumter Iowa had its share of Copperheads and Peace Democrats. However, they were not only a minority, they were a persecuted minority.

For example, the most influential of the Peace Democrats, Henry Clay Dean, once faced the threat of a Keokuk lynch mob because of his convictions.¹

While some historians have also observed that 1854 marked the beginning of a new era of antislavery militancy for Iowa, they have maintained that the new era merely replaced a transition period, which in turn had replaced a proslavery epoch. They have tied their thesis neatly together with the explanation that the evolution in popular attitudes resulted from a gradual change in population makeup. An early, dominant Southern majority, they contend, imbued Iowa with its proslavery sentiments, but then this element was slowly displaced by a swelling tide of Eastern, abolitionist-minded immigrants.

In the last analysis, however, this entire thesis is demonstrably untenable. First, their deductive proofs do not conclusively demonstrate the existence of an early Southern majority, nor do the census compilations prove definitely a rising influence of abolitionist settlers. Secondly, even among the Southern element there were many during those years of the State's beginning who openly avowed antislavery biases.

Contrary to the commonly accepted thesis, then, Iowa's entire antebellum history exhibited but one consistent attitude on slavery: the majority of Iowans opposed it. True, many events occurred which

¹Keokuk Gate City, May 16, 1863.

seem inconsistent with this hostility to slavery, but the answer to that lies in the fact that Iowa was not always a free agent. Many times it failed to voice its antislavery sentiments simply because it was trapped between conflicting desires and motivations.

During the years prior to 1854 Iowa's population primarily wanted an escape from the disturbing demands of its antislavery conscience. Therefore, Iowans hoped that as immigrants to a free frontier State they might avoid all contact with the Black and with the system oppressing him. In such an atmosphere the intense sectional conflicts of the time would be less immediate and consequently less bothersome. It might even be possible to express latent libertarian views and yet not be forced to accept the consequences of living by those views.

This kind of thinking produced, quite logically, the paradox of egalitarian sentiments found in the suffrage debates of the Constitutional Convention of 1844, and, concurrently, the repressive Black Code. It was a perfect combination, a law to ensure that few Negroes would live in the Territory, followed a few years later by sanctimonious speeches commiserating with Blacks over their degraded condition. Yet early Iowans did not really intend hypocrisy. They seriously felt themselves to be in the antislavery camp. The Supreme Court of Iowa probably truly expressed the people's sentiments when it ruled in favor of Ralph, the Black miner. But most of all Iowans wanted to avoid paying the price of their convictions.

As time went by and Iowa passed into Statehood, the desire to

avoid the slavery controversy remained strong. But political maturity brought responsibility, and the new State was forced to become involved. The ingrained antislavery attitudes still gnawed at the popular conscience, yet to yield to them now would aggravate the South and inflame those very passions Iowans wanted desperately to keep cool.

As a territory, Iowa's blind, unreasoning desire for escape had conflicted with and cancelled out libertarian expressions of hostility to the South's hated system. Now as a State, Iowans felt a responsibility to abide by the Constitution and to preserve the Union through conciliation and compromise. Thus they were forced to stifle once more their antislavery stirrings. Not surprisingly, these later years witnessed a Burlington jury soberly reimbursing a Missouri slave-owner who had lost his human chattels at the hands of Iowans, as well as two antislavery senators voting favorably on an even more stringent fugitive slave law.

Then came 1854. The conciliation and compromise which Iowans had felt it their duty to endorse had finally come home to haunt them. Stephen A. Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act opened the door to human bondage on Iowa's western border, and the State's studied pose of conciliation for the national good collapsed immediately. Although Iowa had willingly allowed squatter sovereignty in Utah and New Mexico, it found that concept intolerable in Kansas and Nebraska. Long-suppressed, long-overdue expressions of antislavery hostility finally exploded.

Conciliation, itself a more active form of escapism, passed quietly into oblivion. The slavery controversy had come to Iowa. Escape was impossible, the crusade had begun.

From that time on the free-state remained consistent in its response to the system. Though it was unwilling to make any overt threat to slavery in the South, Iowa readily attacked the institution at any point where it entered the State's jurisdiction. A runaway Black in Iowa was tantamount to a free Black. Any politician who refused to resist adamantly the expansion of slavery faced trouble at the polls. Negroes in the State were given vestigial rights, such as the right to testify against Whites. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Iowans contributed food, supplies and arms to the free-soil cause in Kansas, thus giving themselves an introduction to John Brown and a role in the adventure at Harper's Ferry.

This capsulized review of Iowa's evolution from antislavery timidity to antislavery militancy represents a basically accurate picture of the State's response to the great American controversy. The obvious question therefore arises as to why the previous students of the era failed to perceive this pattern. It could be alleged that they simply did not dig deeply enough into the data, but that alone does not explain their failure, rather the answer lies in the vocabulary they brought to the problem. From the beginning they made unwarranted assumptions about the inter-locking relationships between the concepts they sought to employ. These assumptions sent their work awry

by predetermining their focus on the data.

In their basic thesis--i.e. that Iowa shifted from proslavery to antislavery sentiments under the influence of shifting population patterns--there is one glaring error, the previously-discussed assumption that a Southern-influenced or even a Southern-born pioneer was necessarily proslavery. A substantial element among the Dixie-born had come to Iowa precisely because they wished to escape the institution they knew first-hand.

At the same time, foregoing histories often displayed a tendency to equate racism with proslavery. Again a long list of contradictions, especially in the newspaper fraternity, could be submitted in refutation of that equation. Many apparently sincere antislavery crusaders in Iowa would probably have balked at the idea that the Negro was inherently equal to the White.

But by far the most obvious mistake made by previous historians involved their rather careless handling of the word "abolitionist." The term conjures up the image of an unbending, monomaniacal warrior who recognized no legal, social or moral barrier between the slave and his freedom. The abolitionist was all but deaf on the question of slavery and no argument could make him tolerate it.

Actually, the above pretty accurately describes the abolitionist as he was to be found in Iowa. But many historians hopelessly trap themselves when they lump the whole range of antislavery attitudes and expressions under that single term. Abolitionists were a rare breed

even in the years just prior to the Civil War. Naturally, a student seeking vestiges of antislavery sentiment in the Iowa of Territorial and early-Statehood periods will find nothing if he conducts his search with only the term "abolitionist" in mind. It is little wonder that so many writers found only proslavery thinking in those pre-1854 years. Every attempt to compromise and conciliate, every attempt to escape the slavery controversy could be misinterpreted as a proslavery or pro-Southern expression if there were no contradictory yardstick other than abolitionism to compare them against.

Obviously there is a need for a more moderate term. Unfortunately, no "-ism" is available to supply that need. Therefore, a conscientious student seeking to define that softer attitude of hostility against the South's institution simply uses and reuses the adjective "antislavery" before a variety of relevant nouns, i.e. "antislavery attitudes," "antislavery sentiments," "antislavery advocates," etc. This is, of course, an arbitrary usage, but a distinct element of thought did exist in Iowa which regarded slavery as anathema, and at the same time reviled the abolitionist's response to it; and the above usage successfully defines that element.

Men of this moderate persuasion hated slavery, but they also respected the law and desired the status quo. In Iowa they were a kind of "silent majority," and the history of the antislavery movement in the State is the story of their emergence. To previous historiography the sudden appearance of this group was the result of their recent immi-

gration to Iowa. But that was simply not the case. They had been in the State from its opening. They merely needed a spur to prompt them out of the shadows, and Stephen Douglas unwittingly provided it.

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APPENDIX

TABLE II
 NATIVITY OF NATIVE BORN PIONEERS TO IOWA BY NUMBER¹

Area of nativity	Population by year		
	1850	1856	1860
New England	5,535	18,389	25,040
Middle States	24,516	85,196	103,173
Southern States	30,954	54,942	54,006
Northwest States	59,098	172,303	193,005
Native Iowans	50,380	93,302	191,148
Other Territories	138	122	2,460

Herriott, "Whence the Pioneers," op. cit., p. 464.

TABLE III

NATIVITY OF NATIVE BORN PIONEERS TO IOWA BY PERCENT¹

Area of nativity	Percentage by year		
	1850	1856	1860
New England	3.2 (3.3) ²	4.3 (4.3)	4.4 (4.4)
Middle States	14.3 (14.4)	20.0 (20.1)	18.1 (18.2)
Southern States	18.1 (18.1)	12.9 (13.0)	9.4 (9.5)
Northwest States	34.5 (34.6)	40.6 (40.6)	33.9 (33.9)
Native Iowans	29.6 (29.5)	21.9 (22.0)	33.7 (33.6)
Other Territories	0.8 (0.1)	0.3 (0.0)	0.5 (0.4)

¹Ibid.²Herriott's figures are somewhat unreliable, probably as a result of incomplete calculation. The figures in parentheses represent a recomputation by this writer.